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A Romance

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "THOTH."

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1890

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TOXAR.



PROLOGUE.

BY XENOPHILOS, THE CELEBRATED PHILOSOPHER
AND PHYSICIAN.

I WAS wearied with discoursing to the young men who professed to be my scholars on the mysteries of life and the ignorance of man, and I said : “ I will shoot one more shaft, and then for this day the bow must be unbent. In my long life* I have learned many strange things, and one of the strangest is this : youth is the time of narrow disbelief and hardness of heart and want of generosity—I mean in the matter of opinion, for I know that ye all love me—but every day the old man sees

* Xenophilos is said to have lived two hundred years.

new sides to truth and finds new marvels in life."

Silence fell on the company for a time, and then they began to talk in whispers, and at last the youngest of the young men, my favourite, spoke on behalf of the rest and said :

"Thou hast lived, O Xenophilos, seven times as long as the oldest of us, and we are anxious to learn of thy wisdom. But our youthful minds easily become tired with weighing heavy reasonings, and our weakness leads us into despair, and thus we seem to thee narrow and hard and ungenerous when in truth we are only weary and perplexed. If, however, as on former occasions, thou wouldst clothe thy thoughts in the language of fables or even of truthful histories drawn from thy abundant experience, then perchance we should more readily learn the lesson. Tell us, O master, some story suited to our feebleness."

And I said to them :

“ Are ye not ashamed to ask for fables when I offer the pure truth ? ”

And they answered with one consent, “ No.”

“ Well, then,” I said, “ I will tell you a history ”—and they expressed their delight—“ but since ye will not listen to my pure truth, I shall give you only the tangled threads of some strange lives, and ye must search out the lessons for yourselves.”

“ Most willingly,” they answered.

“ But,” I said, “ ye must also share the labour.”

“ We cannot, O master.”

“ At least,” I said, “ ye can furnish me with the names of the persons ; for although the history I propose to relate is true——”

At this one or two smiled, and I rebuked them for their levity and said :

“ The story I shall tell is in all essentials true, but for many reasons it is not altogether seemly to speak without disguise. And

therefore will I use feigned names, and change in some respects the characters and doings of the persons. But a few still surviving who are familiar with the histories of the past which have justly been repressed by a certain noble family would readily learn my inner meaning. And now without further parley—for I may not speak more fully of my reasons—will ye furnish me with names? Names are to the mass of people more than the men and women.”

“We will provide the names,” they replied, and without more ado I said:

“And first of all there is in my story a young man who after a riotous youth suddenly became a philosopher and lived a life of virtue”—here I heard one of them whisper, “The tale will be more dull than we had hoped for,” and I added—“for a time,” whereat the whisperer smiled.

“Name thou him,” I said to the eldest present.

“For a time?” he repeated, and said, “Doubtless then he was no true philosopher. Let him be called Antinous.”

And the name pleased me well.

“And next I require,” I said to the whisperer, “a name for an old man who was full of knowledge and withal the perfect idea of a slave.”

And my scholar said:

“O master, he shall be called Eumæus, after the god-like swine-herd of Odysseus.”

But I would not let this one escape so easily, and I replied:

“Not so—for my perfect slave was as full of wiles as Odysseus himself, and he was the son of a king, and by no means a swine-herd.”

And my scholar looked abashed and said:

“The son of a king—a perfect slave—and like Odysseus in wiles? Him I cannot name.”

"Then," I said, "the story cannot be told, for this man is second to none in the narrative," and I awaited his reply.

And when he could not answer, I said to the youngest, my favourite :

"In the meantime do thou give thy share and name for me a beautiful barbarian, fierce and courageous as an Amazon and yet withal true and tender. And give her a name such as might be borne without dishonour by a priestess."

And he replied :

"Only yesterday, O master, I could have given thee an excellent name. But, as I had no use for it, it has slipped from my memory. Stay, not altogether—it was very like Velda."

"And Velda," I said, "she shall be, for the sound smacks of ancient simplicity of manners, and the name pleases me well."

Now one of my scholars had recently been afflicted by a violent passion for an evil woman,

and he professed in the bitterness of youth to hate all women, and I said :

“O woman-hater, name for me an evil woman.”

And he replied :

“They are all evil, both by nature and by art.”

“But even in evil,” I said, “there are differences, and this one loved power far more than sensuous pleasure.”

“So do they all,” he said wisely ; “but if she too was a barbarian——”

“She was a Persian,” I interrupted.

“Such an one,” he said, “was Atossa—but any name to me——”

“Peace,” I answered ; “thou wilt recover thy balance long before thou art my age. But Atossa is an excellent name for the purpose.”

“And now,” I said to the whisperer, “art thou not yet ready ?” but he answered, “No.”

"Then," said I, "which one of you all believes most in the gods and omens and soothsaying and the like?"

And they all laughed, and one said maliciously :

"O master, we are all still too young and, as thou didst say, full of narrow disbelief."

"True," I replied ; "but for thy wicked wit thou shalt give me a name for a man who proved himself to be a wonderful soothsayer because he had a power never before heard of."

"What kind of power, O master?"

"That," I said, "ye must learn from the story, and now I will only say that this man, by his nature, knew at once certain things which were quite hidden from others."

"Was there any outward sign?" he questioned.

"Certainly."

"Then," he said, "let him be called Telemos, after the soothsayer of the Cyclopes ;

for assuredly he must have had a wonderful eye if he was like his fellows."

And they all laughed pleasantly, and I said :

"Thou hast hit the mark—by accident—in the very centre. Telemos, for my purpose, is also an excellent name, though the man was no Cyclops."

Then I said again to the whisperer :

"Still not ready ? I am now more easy to please, for I have been well furnished with names."

"Oh, master," he replied, "thou hast broken my spirit."

"This slave that thou must name had also a broken spirit."

"I am in despair," he said, "for this but adds to the difficulty ; and the man seems like no one in history or fable."

"If that is so," I said, "make a name for him as the first man named the birds and the beasts and woman."

"Toxar?" he asked doubtfully after a long pause.

"The name," I answered, "seems sufficiently barbaric and meaningless, and I will accept it in order that the narrative may proceed. And for the rest they are but common clay, a simple maiden who became too good a wife, and a devoted companion who was too good a friend. For these any of the names well known to the common people will suffice—Hermione, Glaucus, and so forth. But I have not yet done with your assistance; for now my only object is to please since I have failed to instruct. And of telling tales there are numberless modes, and I have lived so long and learned so much, that to me all are equally familiar. Ye have given me names, and now ye must give me method and style. And, first of all, shall the characters explain the actions or the actions the characters? and will ye have stately speeches and eloquent musings,

or rather a rapid succession of events struck off with the utmost brevity—in a word, philosophy or adventures? Give your votes.”

And to my shame not one voted for philosophy.

“Now,” I said, almost a little angered, “ye are all young, and I can, if ye will, speak in your manner of deaths and broken friendships and the loss of golden chances. I can speak just as ye would with jests and scoffs and the mocking superiority of youthful wisdom ; or I can speak as an old man who has lost the hardness of his youth, and has lost also children and friends and many a golden hope. Tell me,” I said to the youngest, my favourite.

And after a pause he said : “One thing at least we have all learnt of thee, O master, that life is only born of life, and belief only of belief. And, methinks, if Xenophilos himself were to speak that which he believed not, and to jest aloud when he inwardly

mourned, the story would have no life, and though the men and women and their deeds were as real as this sunlight, yet would the listeners not believe because the narrator seemed to believe not."

"I have gathered thy meaning," I answered, "and it seems good, though expressed with much tediousness. But before thou art my age thou wilt learn to be brief."

Then I dismissed them till the next day in order that I might have time, out of regard for an ancient friendship, at least in outward show to veil the substance of truth with the language of fable.

And on the morrow not only my scholars, but a number of idle young men, who did not even feign to love philosophy, assembled to hear the story. And but for the names and the veiling, in respect of my friend, the narrative is as true as the wonderful histories of Herodotus.

CHAPTER I.

THE BANQUET AND THE TOMB.

ON the day of the beginning of his thirtieth year, Antinous gave to his companions a great feast, which may well serve as the starting-point of this history. From his youth up he had surpassed all the men of his day in the riotous magnificence of his living. His dwelling excelled, in the splendour of its building and the richness and variety of its ornaments, many famous temples ; and his wants were ministered to by a multitude of slaves, selected from all parts for beauty and justness of form and skill in devising pleasures. Nor did he confine his extravagance to the gratification of his own lusts, though these seemed inordinate even in a city which had become a by-word for its luxury. He made himself the delight

of the common people through the setting forth of all kinds of shows, masks and festival spectacles. He sent to the Olympic games seven chariots, and won the first four prizes, and boasted with truth that the native of no other city had ever before done the like. And not only was his magnificence undoubtedly great, but by his singular power of oratory and persuasion he made it appear even greater. For he would affect to make light of his display as if it were but a small matter to any one of wealth and station, and thus he covertly undermined the popularity of those who dared not vie with him in expense.

In less than ten years of early manhood he had succeeded in cloying every appetite with satiety, and in dissipating the greater part of the immense fortune which he had inherited from his ancestors.

In order to recover from the surfeit of pleasure and restore the natural tone of his

mind he suddenly determined to live the life of a philosopher and pursue virtue, and to restore his fortune he arranged to marry the only daughter of the most wealthy man in the city—the ancient city, Peirene.

Marriage and the formation of family ties Antinous considered as the first step in his new life, and although now bent upon moderation in all things, he desired an accession of wealth in order to accomplish a great design worthy of a statesman and a philosopher.

But before the new life could be begun, the old life must be ended, and Antinous thought it utterly unworthy of his reputation to slink away from his old companions and his old pleasures like a coward after a defeat. And to mark his strength of purpose and to make a fitting climax to his riotous youth, he invited his friends to the most luxurious feast that the wit of his slaves could devise. The banquet was a pre-

lude to the wildest debauchery, and it was near daybreak when the new philosopher, with a firm, clear voice, and gestures that showed no sign of excess, prepared to give a formal farewell to his drunken companions in a set speech. When he had explained his reasons, plans and purposes, in a manner equally satisfactory to himself and unintelligible to them, he dismissed them as Circe might dismiss her swine.

Only one friend remained, who from boyhood had been knit to Antinous by the closest ties of affection, and had shared, although with reluctance, for he was almost of a contrary nature to his friend, all his perils, adventures and pleasures. The friendship of the two was, in truth, altogether of the like and unlike which is the rarest and strongest of all.

The slaves, dancing girls and musicians were ordered to depart, and the friends were left alone in the deserted banquetting chamber.

The air was heavy with perfumes, broken garlands were scattered over the soft Persian couches, and wine-cups, heedlessly cast down, lay in the stains which they had made.

"Tell me, Glaucus, was this the most magnificent banquet thou hast ever seen?"

"Undoubtedly."

"No sign of the coming reign of philosophy and reason?"

"Not in the least."

"And I did nothing to mar the enjoyment or restrain the excess?"

"On the contrary."

"And in this mode could any one have devised more cunningly a series of pleasures and delights?"

"I cannot think so."

"Then," said Antinous, "it is full time that I changed my style of life, for to me the feast and the rioting were as dull and monotonous as the noise of the waves of the sea. Methinks I can feel no more."

"Nay, say not so. The best of life yet remains ; for thy strength is unimpaired, thy courage is as high as ever and the earth is full of danger."

"Danger—true. I had almost forgotten. But it is not yet day—there is still time."

Antinous left the apartment and returned in a short time with a bar of iron and a lantern carefully shaded.

"What is thy design ?" said Glaucus.

"To crown this part of my life with the most reckless of deeds."

"Say on, I share it."

"I will take from the tomb the bones of the founder of this city——"

"Hush—the walls may not hear this."

"Even the bones of the mighty hero——"

"Thou canst not—thou dardest not——"

"And I will lay them at the door of our chief ruler, my enemy ; thou knowest how I hate him since he wronged me in the matter of the slave."

"But this is the frenzy of madness, not hatred of one man. The bones—the removal—I fear to breathe the words—must bring evil to thee and not to thine enemy."

"Prithee," said Antinous, "let me finish unfolding my plan and then thou canst rate me deaf. I will lay these bones at the door of mine enemy with this message: 'The founder of this city sends by the hands of Antinous to his flabby, soft-fleshed successor these bones as a sign.'"

"The people will tear thee in pieces. Forget this folly—the wine has conquered even thee."

"Nay, the scheme was devised as I swam in the sea in the cool of the morning, seven days ago."

"But I tell thee the people will rend thy limbs."

"That is the danger, and the pleasure will be when I beguile them with my oratory."



"No oratory could save thee."

"Thou shalt see—but the rest of my plan," and Antinous laughed, "I will not trust even to thine ears. The secret is too curious for any one to keep," and he laughed again.

Glaucus looked upon him with questioning glances and said : "But thyself—surely even thou hast respect for the dead—at least for dead heroes ?"

"Bones are but bones—to the philosopher," was the reply, "and I see no other equal danger ready to hand."

"But to confess the deed is certain death."

"Confess ?—thou dost not understand. I will but arouse a strong suspicion in order to allay it by a splendid oration. If I cannot do this I am unfit to carry out the plan which I have formed for the future."

"What plan ?"

"To found a prosperous colony in honour of my native city."

"Surely this is the strangest way to begin to honour thy native city and to lead forth a colony—to desecrate the bones of the founder; the very words stick in my throat."

"Then thou wilt not share this last peril?"

"Nay, if nothing will stay thee I will bear my part. But once more I implore thee—think of the horror and the danger."

"Bones are but bones, and danger is what I seek."

"Come, then," said Glaucus with a sigh, "let us do the deed quickly, and then say our last farewell to the sun."

"Courage," and Antinous again laughed aloud. "I will save thee and myself."

They went forth into the blackness of night and found the city wrapped in slumber. They stumbled along the narrow by-streets to avoid the observation of any late reveller or wakeful watchman until they came

to an open space which had been left to the protection of a lofty cliff against sea-ward attack. They stopped near a huge mound on the summit of which a small open temple had been erected, five pillars supporting a circular roof. Here in a tomb made of rough slabs of stone, ornamented with weather-worn figures and mystic signs, had reposed through forgotten ages, so it had been handed down, the bones of the founder of the city. The tomb had never been opened and no mortal knew whether the bones of the hero had become dust or, shut off from the air, had kept their hardness.

“Stay,” said Glaucus, “this dead man has done thee no harm, nay, rather as founder of the city, he was founder also of thy fortune. Leave him to his rest, and let us return and forget this impious design.”

“Return if thou wilt—I alone will do what I proposed. The shaking of these dead bones shall make the living hearts in this

city quake with terror and hatred. See, the lid only rests by its own weight," and Antinous put his iron bar to the heavy stone.

"Nay! the deed can never be undone or forgotten."

"That but spurs me on."

"For my sake, then—I thought I was as callous as thou—together we have done many a deed beyond the just bounds of nature—but none such as this. Come, let us slay some living enemy and leave this tomb inviolate. Thou canst not look on the stars and listen to the sea and do this thing. The gods——"

Antinous struck him lightly on the shoulder, and then with upraised eyes like a priest at the altar, looked steadfastly on the sky. After a pause, he turned his face to the sea and seemed to listen to the dash of the waves at the base of the cliff. For a moment Glaucus thought that he was moved

by the scene, but on the instant, Antinous relaxed the dignity of his bearing, and said :

“ The sea has its old moaning sound, and the gods—they are as viewless and silent as empty air. As for the stars, it is the rising of Arcturus, and the harvest is ripe. And this,” he said, suddenly raising the slab with the iron bar, “ this is the harvest that I will gather.”

As he spoke the great stone slipped to the ground, and Antinous thrusting his hand into the tomb drew forth a bone. He poised it in his hand, passed his fingers over it, and held it up to the light of the stars. “ This was part of the arm of the hero. Doubtless in life this bone was strong as iron, and now—see!” As he spoke he struck it on the side of the tomb and broke it in two pieces.

Glaucus shuddered with terror and his tongue refused to utter a word, but Antinous unmoved again thrust in his hand. This time

he drew forth the skull, and holding it up to look, loosened from its hold a golden circlet. "Ah!" he said, "surely this was the crown of the hero, and I feel upon it strange letterings and old graving. I must look on it more closely though we perish." He removed the covering from his lantern. "Look!" he said, "thou hast perchance read more than I—be mine interpreter." Glaucus, against his will, looked, but he had never seen the like and he shook his head.

Antinous carefully replaced the circlet on the skull and again looked intently and said: "This is marvellously strange. In the centre of this circlet there is an opening as if for a jewel, and, by all the gods and heroes! there seems to be corresponding to it a slight hollow in the skull. Read me that riddle. Has the jewel worn away the bone or is it the work of chance? This jewel I must find if I die for it with my plan unachieved." Again he put in his hand

and groped in the dust. "I have it ! I have it !" he cried. "This I will keep for myself." He held close to the lantern a round shining stone, in colour and size like a splendid opal.

By some mishap it slipped from his hand, and in his eagerness to recover it, in the darkness he trod upon it with his heel, and in a moment it was broken to shivers. He picked up a little fragment, and checking his irritation said, "Surely it was an opal, for no other gem is so brittle. But it is time to depart or we shall be broken in like manner. Come !" He took up the pieces of the broken arm and the skull and placed the golden circlet on his own head. He extinguished his lamp and gave it with the iron bar to Glaucus.

They hastened back in silence, but in a short space Antinous stopped : "Is there some witchcraft in this gold that disturbs my judgment ?"—and he took the circlet

from his head—"or have these bones not yet lost all their power?"—and he laid them on the ground.

They stood still and looked around. Before them lay the city broken into shapeless masses by the darkness, above was the black immensity of the sky pierced through with a myriad points of fire, and behind was the dishonoured tomb of the hero and the pathless sea. "Even I," said Antinous, "feel the power of this dead man. I can almost see his ghost shaking the shadow of this arm in impotent wrath, and I can hear the shrill faint hiss of his voiceless anger. Had I waited a little longer he would have subdued me and kept his tomb untroubled, although well I know he lives not at all save in my fancy. Truly the dead rule the living, and the strongest cannot escape their thralldom."

"Let us return with speed," said his friend, "and replace these dreadful signs.

To-morrow we will offer a noble sacrifice and no living wight will know, and the dead will be appeased."

But Antinous recovered his courage and said : "The gods and the dead are as shapeless and empty as the mists of autumn. I was but recalling for thy pleasure the images of the poets. But this deed I will complete if I fight my way through a host of shadows. Here is my tablet with the message to my enemy already inscribed. Look to the east—that is surely the first reddening of the dawn. Come, the rest of my musings on the dead thou shalt hear in my oration when I still the fury of the people."

He gathered up the bones and the golden circlet, and they stole back to the house of Antinous.

On the way thither, he left the spoils of the tomb and the insult on the tablet at the door of his enemy, even as he had planned from the beginning.

CHAPTER II.

ANTINOUS AS ORATOR.

LONG before the days of Antinous, Peirene had been celebrated amongst the cities of Greece for the luxury and wantonness of its inhabitants, and the ancient virtues had become sport for the writers of comedies. Those gods in whose praise mysteries had been established were indeed honoured, if the unbounded licentiousness of the worshippers be an honour ; but no man revered any god who was not an excuse for excess. The poor ministered to the vices of the rich, and the rich gave their substance to the poor under the semblance of public festivals.

None but slaves lifted a hand to labour, and the slaves were specially rewarded by being admitted to the most shameless and disgraceful of the sacred mysteries. And the

number of the slaves was seven times the number of the free.

And yet in the midst of this corruption and decay there were remnants of former health and vigour. Deep down in the recesses of the mind old-world feelings lay hidden ready to rush forth in a tumult if they were summoned loudly enough. First and foremost, by a common contradiction of humanity, the people still honoured the fair name of the city which they had polluted, and to save it from the unworthy touch of an enemy would have made of it a vast funeral pyre. Next, and indeed as part of the same honour, they revered their dead, and especially the fathers of their race. Besides this, the minds of the common sort were also filled with superstitions, and though they recked little of the gods they thought much of signs and omens and the double words of oracles. Thus was the sacrilege of Antinous fraught with the utmost danger.

As soon as the sun was well up a slave discovered at the door of the chief ruler the tablet inscribed by Antinous, and close to it the circlet of gold, but he observed not the broken bones. At first he was tempted by the gold, but not being able to read and fearing some snare he took the writing and the golden crown to his master. The master of the house was delighted with the treasure, thinking it to be a present from some friend. But when he had read the tablet his countenance changed, and he said hastily to the slave, "Were there any bones beside this gold?" And the slave replied, "I cannot remember; I was dazzled by the curious gold." "Run and see—with all speed."

The slave ran and soon returned with a scared face, bearing the broken arm and the skull. At once the ruler perceived that the bones were very ancient, and he knew that they were at one time part of a living man. At first, however, he could not believe that

the tablet spoke truth, and feared to be made sport of by Antinous, his enemy; but when he reflected on the reckless audacity of the young man and his bitter hatred, he began to doubt. He rushed to the door, but there stood hesitating. And as he waited two children came running to the house followed by an old man, breathless with haste. "The hero's tomb has been broken open; but not by us," lisped the children. "The tomb of the founder has been defiled," gasped the old man, "and the city is doomed to destruction."

In an incredibly short time the rumour spread through the city, and the people went in crowds to see. And they found the tomb certainly broken into, for the heavy slab that had covered it was still on the ground, and near it lay a little dust and a fragment of bone.

Then the chief ruler, standing on the steps of the little temple, called for silence and read

aloud the tablet. And pale fear and anger rushed over the upturned faces of the people as a sudden squall strikes the sea into white foam. In a moment they forgot the pleasures which Antinous had given them in festivals and the love which they had borne him for his courage, and beauty, and boundless generosity. Wild voices arose : " Rend the defiler in pieces." " Crucify him." " Burn him for a sacrifice." Not one word was said in his favour—not even a word of doubt. Horror had enchained their belief.

But when the tumult was at its height, suddenly Antinous appeared on the scene. He was surrounded by a strong company of devoted mercenaries that he had gathered about him on the expeditions and travels in which he formerly delighted. The unarmed mob was for the moment awed (for the custom of wearing iron had long fallen into disuse) ; but at the same time the people were the more convinced of his guilt by this appearance

of force, and those near him muttered, and those at a safer distance shouted, execrations. Antinous, with face unmoved as a mask, forced his way to the side of the chief ruler and demanded to be heard. The ruler, taken aback and fearing violence, called again for silence ; and for the time curiosity got the better of horror, and the people pressed to listen, and kept their fury in their hearts.

As soon as he saw that he would obtain a hearing, Antinous dismissed his mercenaries to the last man ; even Glaucus he forced to leave his side. The mob closed in upon him like water, and he stood alone at the mercy of the people.

Antinous had been trained in oratory by the best masters, and was familiar with every device of rhetoric, and could play on the passions as a musician on the lyre. Like the greatest actors he threw his whole strength into his part, and to such effect that when

he said what he knew to be false, yet he almost persuaded even himself that he was speaking the truth. He became, in truth, the spokesman of the dumb thoughts and feelings of the crowd, and in turn gave and followed the lead in popular excitement. His voice was full and deep, and save for the purpose of his art, the flow of his language was never checked. His gestures and action were such as to excite those too distant to follow his argument, and those who heard every word were enslaved by his eloquence and lost to common reason and judgment.

Never before, however, had Antinous addressed an assembly roused to the extreme of fury against him, and yet as he looked on the pallid faces and muttering lips of the crowd he burned with exultation. Since daybreak he had brooded over the desecration of the tomb, and he had felt more and more in spite of his reason and disbelief the strange power of the dead. At one time he clothed the

bones of the hero with flesh, and put life in his eyes and breath in his nostrils, and fought side by side with him at the siege of Troy. Then he recalled the figments of the poets, and the pallid ghost of the dead man stood before his face and almost made him tremble with mysterious dread.

But as the light of day became larger, his thoughts turned to the inevitable popular tumult, and his heart throbbed with high resolve as he contrasted the triumph of success with the cruel doom of failure. He had prepared his oration in the most minute detail long before he heard of the public accusation, and he was ready to come on the scene with all the appearance of innocence and indignation in the greatest haste to repel an unjust charge.

For a brief space after he had dismissed his following, he stood as it were breathless, and laid his hand on his heart as if he would lay it bare to the public gaze. His head was

uncovered as a slave's, but his broad, smooth brow and full dark eyes looked open as the daylight. His cheek was a little paler than its wont, and his lips, slightly opened, appeared to tremble.

Well he knew the power of manly beauty over the Greeks, and with eyes that seemed to look into the distant future as if ready for death, he searched the faces of the people to hit the exact point of time to begin his oration.

Deep silence fell upon the crowd, and as he raised his hand towards the sky in mute appeal to the gods, even the very breathing was hushed and held in check, and no man stirred hand or foot. Above all people, the Greeks love oratory and admire beauty and courage.

With his first words, Antinous made himself one with his accusers. He turned to the broken tomb and with a loud voice, trembling with passion, he prayed that the

author of this impious deed might be accursed, and avowed that no punishment, whether at the hands of men or of the gods, could be too great for such a crime.

Then, full of the thoughts excited by his long reflections in the solitude of the early dawn, he recounted the mystery and horror of the power of the dead, so that even those who had imagined that they were quite beyond the reach of superstition, grew cold in spite of the glare of the sun. With wonderful art he brought in the words of the poets, which the people had learned by rote in their childhood, and he filled with meaning by the power of his utterance what before had seemed empty musical sounds.

The listeners soon began to feel not only that the speaker could not, even had he wished, have done this thing, but that no man of their race could even have imagined it in his heart.

But Antinous turned again to the broken

tomb, and with singular skill again aroused the suspicions of the people as he showed that there was no enemy near their gates, and that the violation was clearly the work of man.

And at this point he reached the climax of his audacity, as with quick utterance and thundering voice, he declared that the tablet must have been written and the tomb defiled by some enemy who had tried to wreak upon him a fearful vengeance.

Then, without a pause and taking advantage of the excitement, he asked the people, as if they knew already, who this man could be.

The silence was profound, and the faces of the crowd were stretched towards the orator as they waited for him again to act as their spokesman.

With a rapid glance he saw that his triumph was complete. Then suddenly he turned with uplifted arm and threatening mien to the

chief ruler, his enemy, and cried aloud to the people :

“ This—this is the man—none other could have done this thing ; if ye doubt my words look on his craven guilty face.”

And as was natural, the chief ruler, astonished and horror-stricken at the sudden accusation, and seeing at once his peril, looked the image of discovered crime and cowardly guilt.

A voice in the crowd shouted, “ Slay him ! ” It was the signal for a roar of vengeance.

A sudden ungovernable rush—a sharp cry of fear—a shriek for pity—a breathless protest—and all was over. The man was torn and trampled to death at the feet of his enemy.

Such was the greatest triumph of the oratory of Antinous, and the fitting climax to his life of reckless daring.

CHAPTER III.

THE MAN OF MEANS.

WHEN Antinous had thus put a period to his licentious habits, and by an act of insolent audacity had caused the death of his chief enemy, he astonished both his former friends and the people by the temperance of his life and the dignity of his bearing. As soon as he considered that this display of virtue had made sufficient impression—and no people are so fickle in opinion as the Greeks—he gave out that he purposed to lead forth a colony to a distant region, and he invited all those who were of his present way of thinking and nauseated with grosser pleasures, to join him in founding a new city, where they might live with the ancient simplicity of manners.

And numbers of young men were charmed

with the scheme, and became as eager for tranquillity of mind and health of body as they had formerly been for furious lusts and all kinds of licence. They looked with longing to the new country, as men on a plain, parched up by the heat of summer, look with longing to the distant mountains.

In order to prepare for the task of establishing and governing his colony in the best manner, Antinous took counsel with the most celebrated philosophers of the time and with men famous for their practice in political affairs. He studied also the histories of the past and the accounts of travellers.

But the result of his labour was to bring him almost to the verge of despair, for as soon as he had heard one method described as the best, he straightway found another opinion of equal authority to an opposite effect. The only point on which there appeared to be unanimity was that the celebrated saying of the Megarian was undoubtedly true

—namely, that “woman is an evil thing.” But this was plainly too narrow a foundation on which to erect a new state which was intended to be self-sufficient for many generations, and no two philosophers or men of affairs could agree how the evil was to be met, the opinions being divided whether it was better to treat women as slaves or as equals.

In the midst of this controversy, which became a subject of hot debate with the new philosophers, Antinous was assisted to arrive at a conclusion from a most unexpected quarter.

He carried out his plan of taking to wife Hermione, the daughter of the wealthy merchant. The maiden had been brought up in the greatest innocence in a country estate, and Antinous had never seen her until the eve of his marriage. He had expected, and, in his newly-formed antipathy to pleasure, almost desired, that she would prove ill-

favoured in appearance, rustic in bearing and sharp of tongue—in a word, endowed with all the qualities which the comedians are accustomed to attribute to the wives of the philosophers.

He found, on the contrary, that she was beautiful in person, graceful in movement and gentle in manner. Above all, she was of simple nature, and knew nothing of the corruptions of the city. She had been taught by her father to look upon her future husband as one of the noblest of men, and she came prepared in all simplicity to treat him with the greatest honour and affection.

His young wife's innocence proved a delightful surprise to Antinous, and he thought that he had discovered for the first time the full meaning of the distinction between true and false pleasures and pure and impure delights. He was confirmed in his life of temperance, and made his wife an equal com-

panion, to whom he might confide everything—always excepting the licentiousness of his youth.

It was under this new influence that he fully determined to exclude from his colony all those strange women who more than anything else had destroyed the cities of Greece, and he resolved to draw the greater part of his colonists from the uncorrupted country districts. This was the more easy since, owing to war, famine and usury, the country people were overburdened with debts, and were desirous of escaping with their families to a new land.

Whilst Antinous was busily engaged in the purchase of galleys and the hire of seamen, and other preparations, and when he had been forced to the conclusion that it was in vain to consult the philosophers and men of experience, and better to trust to chance and the variety of circumstance, it was his fortune to discover a counsellor of the most

extraordinary wisdom and the most peculiar temperament.

This man was a slave, who had been brought to Peirene for sale by his master, when he heard that many wealthy young men had abandoned themselves to philosophy. This slave, it was reported, had been trained in all kinds of learning of the philosophers and physicians, and in other branches of knowledge and science, just as other slaves are trained in music, dancing and the baser crafts.

He seemed to be approaching old age, though still full of vigour. His appearance betokened that he was of foreign blood. His cheek-bones were higher than in the Grecian mould, his complexion ruddy, and his hair, untouched by age, was lighter than gold in colour. His eyes were between blue and grey, and twinkled in a restless, furtive manner that could not fail to attract the attention. He was huge of frame, and looked

as much an athlete as a man of learning. He halted in his steps as if at some time he had been severely hurt and not carefully attended.

Antinous heard so much of this slave, and the exorbitant price demanded for him, that curiosity impelled him to see the man in person. He began at once to question his master respecting his qualifications and training, but the owner rejoined :

“It is better to consult the man himself ; he has not long been with me, and he speaks nothing but truth.”

Antinous smiled with incredulity, but addressed the slave :

“What art thou ?”

“A slave.”

“But I mean thy race, country and training.”

“I was the son of a king”—again Antinous smiled as a superior, but the man, though looking full in his face, went on

without concern—"of a barbarian tribe far to the north, and I was captured in my youth by Phœnician traders and sold to the Greeks."

"And then?"

"First of all I tried to escape and return to my country. I failed every time, and was beaten and tortured. See these scars on my shoulders, and these twisted fingers and broken foot."

The slave pointed to sure evidence of ill-treatment.

"The last time I was captured," he continued, "the torture was carried too far, and I was rendered lame for many years."

"Is that all thy story?"

"My spirit also was broken, and I tried to escape no more. I was sold to a poor man of learning at a cheap price, and he soon discovered that I also was well fitted to become a man of learning and a philosopher. Such I am and have now been these many years."

“And what kind of philosophy dost thou teach?” asked Antinous.

“Every kind,” replied the slave, “and all manner of learning in addition. I am also skilled in practical wisdom, and I speak nothing but truth—that is, to my master.”

“And to others,” said Antinous, “dost thou speak falsely?”

“That is as my master chooses to order. Since my spirit was broken I only obey. I am an instrument for another to direct.”

“What is thy name?”

“Many names have I had, but I have long been best known by the name of the man of means.”

“O man of means,” said Antinous, “enlighten me regarding this curious title.”

“The words,” said the slave, “need no interpretation. My master for the time being—I have had many in my life—declares to me the object or end which he desires to

attain, and I, by my wisdom and learning, show him the best means to achieve success."

"Give me an example of thy method."

"If the master wishes to attain pleasure, the slave points out the limits, the variety, the worth and the cost of different pleasures, and the best means for their accomplishment. In the same way, if the master desires honour, or riches, or virtue, the slave again declares the means. Since my spirit was broken I have become the perfect idea of a slave. I have been the man of means to a miser, to a reveller, to a tyrant and to many others, and I have proved myself an excellent servant in every capacity."

"Hast thou then no faults?" asked Antinous, laughing at the calm unconcern of the slave.

"The faults that are part of the weakness of man. I choose always what appear to be the best means, but judgment may fail, and what seems at one time the better course

may prove at the last to be the worse. But I speak only truth—to my master—and I always declare any uncertainty so that he may decide for himself.”

“But how,” questioned Antinous scornfully, “have thy masters given up such a perfect slave?”

“As it happens all have died in the accomplishment of their desires. Ill fortune has attended every one. But the slave cannot control death.”

The eyes of the man twinkled with a strange light, and Antinous tried in vain to stare him down. Then he said: “Man of means and speaker of truth, hadst thou any part in their death?”

“I have but suggested means when the master has declared the end. None of my masters ever desired death, and I have had no occasion to explain the best means for that object. But on death a mass of learning has accumulated, and if it is thy desire to live

in order to die in a certain way, I can assist thee. I am nothing but a man of means."

"Dost thou declare that thy advice has not ruined thy masters?"

"My advice," said the slave, "has only led towards the fulfilment of their desires."

"To their death?"

"A slave cannot control death and fate. But I grant, if thou art superstitious, that ill luck has attended all my masters." Again the man's eyes twinkled furtively as he looked on Antinous as coldly as the light glances from shining iron.

"And what," said Antinous, "is the object of thy present master?"

"To sell me at the highest price, and therefore have I declared my good qualities with perfect truth, for a truthful slave is a rarity, and truthfulness alone is worth a large sum."

Antinous was unable to penetrate the mind of the man, and suspected that he was afflicted

in some way to a degree of madness in spite of his wisdom, and he said suddenly :

“ Art thou perchance mad, O man of means ? ”

“ Since my spirit was broken I have often been called mad,” replied the other, “ but no test that is known convicts me of madness. Try me, or let thy physicians and all the wise men of Peirene try me. What is thy intention if thou buyest me ? ”

“ I purpose to lead forth a colony, and I need a counsellor and, as thou sayest, a man of means. Canst thou advise me in building up a new state ? ”

“ I have acquired all the learning of the political writers, and I am acquainted with many forms of government in different cities. I am, besides, an excellent judge of the fitness of other men for different kinds of work. I can advise the means if thou declarest the kind of colony. Prove me if thou wilt.”

"Come with me," said Antinous, "and I will examine thee further at my leisure."

On the next day he was so well satisfied with the variety of the slave's knowledge, and with his truthfulness, that he paid his price. Thereafter he began to use the man of means as his own hand and eye.

Now the name of the slave was Toxar, but more commonly he was called simply the man of means.

CHAPTER IV.

THE NEW COLONY.

TOXAR, the man of means, soon acquired the confidence of Antinous to such an extent that his chosen friend Glaucus seemed almost affected by jealousy. But he declared, when accused of it, that he could no more envy a favourite slave than a favourite dog or horse. At the same time, however, he warned Antinous against the danger of putting too great trust in one of whom he knew nothing, except by his own report, and he advised him to make closer inquiries of the trader from whom the slave was purchased.

To this Antinous made no objection, but on searching for the man he learned that he was dead.

‘ He had apparently fallen into evil hands with the large sum of money upon him which

he had obtained from his sales, and had been robbed and murdered.

"It is well," said the man of means to Antinous, "that thou art not superstitious, nor a believer in omens and unlucky chances. For this last master of mine, like all the rest, has perished miserably in the fulfilment of his desires."

At the instigation of Glaucus, the most searching inquiries were made in order to discover if the man of means was involved in the supposed crime, but nothing appeared, and the confidence of Antinous was so much the more increased.

On the other hand, Glaucus, who was the most devoted of friends, kept a still more watchful eye on the new adviser. But in spite of all his efforts he could find no fault in him. Toxar was to all appearance, even as he had declared, a living instrument with no more thought of self than a potter's wheel.

In process of time the colony was established ; and it was much further to the north than any other settlement of the Greeks.

The site chosen, as is the custom with most Greek colonies, was a neck of land which could easily be defended from attack both by land and sea. On the landward side the country was mountainous and savage, but towards the sea the neck of land shaped itself into a lofty flat.

The headland was encompassed on every side by rugged inaccessible cliffs, and was thus perfectly secure from attack.

The only harbour was near the neck of land and was very easy of defence, and the only approach to the new city was by a very steep path.

The whole promontory was covered with a thick forest, which gave promise of a rich soil when the ground had been cleared of its wild trees. The climate was mild and

salubrious, and everything promised well for success.

The new city thrrove apace, and Antinous soon discovered that his labour in balancing the merits of different forms of government had been thrown away. For uncorrupted by luxuries and immersed in labour, the country people lived in peace and simplicity without the fear of any law before their eyes.

. The greater part of the young philosophers who might have proved a source of danger soon became heartily tired of the hard life and enforced moderation, and slunk back to the mother city. Glaucus, however, with a remnant of those of stronger fibre, remained and planned the defences of the place, and trained the people in military exercises in case of need. Toil in the dust and sun of summer and the rain and storms of winter soon brought rude health and natural appetite in place of the stimulated passions and the

mock philosophizings of their former life. They rejoiced in their newly-gained strength of mind and body, and thought with scorn of their weakly comrades who had deserted them on the first trial.

But of all the colonists, the captain of the colony, Antinous himself, was the most elated. To him a great gulf seemed to have opened up between the old life and the new, and the man who had strained and distorted every passion with excess, and had sought for momentary excitement in the violation of the most sacred things and the outrage of nature, now took the greatest pleasure in learning the arts of the fisher and husbandman. And most of all he took delight in the joyous innocence of his young wife, and her boundless confidence in his goodness aroused his generosity to give her worthy gifts in return. With the utmost zeal he took part in her child-like pursuits, and he strove in every way to

honour her as the famous women of olden times were honoured. The birth of a daughter bound them together still more closely, and the turbid past became as dim and faint as a half-remembered story.

The whole colony loved and honoured the lady Hermione, and especially did Glaucus treat her with a most honourable affection. And by nature he was far better fitted to live a hard life in a new land than to spend his strength in the delicious corruption of an old city. Labour and danger and hardship he loved, and every day brought the pleasures of some new mode of fatigue.

Toxar, the man of means, proved equal to the acquittance of his boasts. He was full of all kinds of strange lore, and specially skilled in the use of herbs and simples. On many occasions also, he showed that he was ready with devices in meeting unexpected difficulties, and he was constantly

revealing his knowledge of various arts. But most of all he was of service in dealing with the surrounding barbarians ; for he either knew already or easily acquired their language, and it was mainly through his counsels that peace was preserved, notwithstanding the fighting ardour of Glaucus, until there was little danger from attack. Yet he always professed to be nothing but a man of means, and was for ever asking the end in view before he gave his advice.

In spite of his lame foot he moved about with great celerity, and when the children laughed at his ungainly movements and strange appearance he paid no regard, and with his crooked hands he often made them playthings in the deftest manner.

Yet, notwithstanding his extraordinary docility and wonderful aptitudes, he seemed always a stranger amongst strangers. Even those whom he had cured of diseases never felt

for him the least affection, and the children always accepted his toys with fearfulness.

Glaucus especially continued to distrust him, and counselled Antinous to be rid of him before he did some mischief; but when asked for his reasons he could give none, and Antinous declared that his distrust was only childish envy. Still Glaucus persisted in his warnings, and urged his friend at least to put this man of strange blood and stranger habits to the proof. At last Antinous lost patience and said: "Devise some test that will satisfy thee, and let us have done with this suspicion. To me the man seems the most useful of all the colonists; but for our ancient friendship I will slay him or send him away if thou canst discover any sign of treachery. What dost thou fear?"

"All his former masters by his own showing have perished miserably," was the gloomy answer.

"Then," said Antinous, "the test is easy. I will put myself in his power when escape for him is easy and certain, and we shall see if he will attempt my life."

"Nay," said his friend, "rather will I be dumb for ever regarding him. Thou shalt not run such a risk."

But as it happened chance furnished an opportunity for the trial. For Antinous, on a hunting excursion, was wounded in the slaying of a boar, when far from all his companions. All night he lay groaning with pain, near the dead beast, and had well-nigh bled to death. But in the nick of time he was found by the man of means, who brought him to his senses and carefully dressed his wound and said: "The wound may prove dangerous. What does the master desire?"

"To see my wife and child before I die."

Then upon the huge barbarian exerted his great strength to the utmost and

carried Antinous back to the city. And there he nursed him most carefully until he had recovered of his hurt.

And from that time Glaucus was ashamed to betray his distrust, though he still concealed it in his heart.

And the new colony prospered more and more, year by year, and the seasons hurried past in the fulness of happiness.

Peace and simplicity and rustic content filled every breast.

And Antinous, who was well versed in the poets, in spite of his disbelief in gods and omens began to be afraid of so great and continuous good fortune, and looked on every side without and within for some sign of a calamity.

But Hermione and the child laughed at his forebodings, and Glaucus bade him hunt more frequently.

Only the man of means re-echoed his fears. "All my masters," he said as coldly as he

would speak of broken pottery, "all my masters, without exception, have perished miserably. But my present master believes not in omens." And his eyes shone like an evil star.

Five years the colony flourished beyond all expectation, and was augmented greatly in numbers, for since the land was plentiful it was deemed best both by Antinous and the people to attract those skilled in agriculture and in handicrafts from other districts of Greece, in order to strengthen the place against the invasion of the barbarian tribes. But none were admitted who were likely to weaken the state in any way, and especially was it forbidden to bring in strange women. So strictly was this policy carried out for the protection of the common people, that no one was permitted to bring foreign slaves, and the slaves which they had brought with them were treated more like hired labourers.

For Antinous well knew by experience, that slaves were the root of corruption in his native city, and though the government was in name and form a democracy, the influence of the captain of the colony was paramount and unquestioned.

CHAPTER V.

THE FAMINE.

SUDDENLY without warning the colony fell on evil times. Day after day in the early summer a fog came up from the sea, dry, dense and murky. The corn was blasted in the blade and a murrain fell upon the cattle. As the summer advanced the wells were dried up, and the people only obtained with difficulty from distant streams enough water to drink, and their cattle, weakened by disease, perished in hundreds. The harvest gave barely enough for seed and the stores left over from previous years of plenty were but scanty owing to the constant influx of new mouths.

In this extremity Antinous acted with the greatest courage and prudence. He set the example of rigid abstinence and doled

out with the utmost care the supplies garnered by the state against the necessities of a war.

He sent Glaucus to the nearest city to charter ships with corn, but he could obtain little without money, and the colony had in prosperity been rich only in cattle and men, and now the treasury was empty.

As soon as Glaucus returned he maintained that the only way to save the state was to obtain by force what they could not purchase, and he offered to plunder the coasts and if necessary to join with the pirates who still infested the seas.

But in the meantime some of the newcomers, driven to the verge of starvation, seized the best of the ships and sailed away from the famine-stricken land.

Winter was fast approaching, the granaries were almost bare, whilst outside the city the barbarians were becoming more insolent every day, and within, the people began to

murmur. Even Hermione seemed saddened and hopeless, though she tried to bear a brave face before her lord.

Antinous was in despair and took counsel with his man of means, who never offered advice except on request.

"Man of means," he said, "now is the time to show thy skill. Obtain food for us or we perish utterly."

"I have already," replied Toxar, "shown the wild roots and weeds that may serve for food in necessity."

"But even they begin to fail and the corn is well-nigh done."

"It is for the master to declare the end. I am, as thou knowest, but a man of means," but his eyes belied the humility of his words.

"The end," said Antinous gloomily, "is plain enough, for unless we obtain food quickly, ends and means are all one."

"Has then the captain of the colony no

other end but to save the people from famine ? ”

“ Plainly not,” said Antinous with impatience. “ Have done with thy catch-word.”

“ Thy slave,” continued Toxar unmoved, “ was told many times that thou wouldst rather see thy colony destroyed by war or famine than by luxury and corruption—and in all soberness I am but a man of means. Thy city can be saved from starvation with ease, but what wilt thou say to thy counsellor if luxury is therewith brought hither ? ”

“ Art thou mad,” said Antinous, “ to speak of luxury and abundance of wealth when the people are dying by scores for want of a little treasure to buy food ? Save the city from present famine and we can guard it from luxury as before.”

“ It is thine to declare the end, and to say if simplicity and virtue are purchased too dearly at the risk of death. Choose between luxury and starvation now that

the choice must be in deed, and not in word as in a school boy's theme."

Antinous looked upon his strange adviser with wonder, but his shifting glances completely hid his thoughts. Certainly the man seemed no more mad than before, and yet his words were incredible. Antinous stood for a time lost in thought whilst Toxar eyed him curiously. "Declare the end, O master—virtue with the deaths of many, or life and plenty—virtue or no virtue. To the living instrument it is all one. Nought am I but a man of means."

"Surely," said Antinous, "this is no time for jesting. If thou canst, save my people."

"A slave cannot jest—but to save this city from famine is easy. Come."

He led Antinous in the direction of the headland. They soon passed beyond the limits of the city and through the blighted corn fields and the parched meadows, where filthy birds were feeding on the decaying

carcasses of the cattle. They saw no man, for all work had been given over through weakness and despair. And Antinous grieved and mourned with all his heart as he thought on the quiet pleasures he had witnessed in those very fields, and pictured to himself the utter ruin of his colony.

Then they came to the uncleared forest, and the leaves on the oldest trees seemed stunted and withered with the severity of the drought and the baneful fogs and blight. Even in the deepest shade the ground was cracked and seamed with the heat and the dryness of the air, and all the life of the place seemed to have been scattered into swarms of flies.

And when they had penetrated a long way into the depths of the forest they came to the sacred boundary which had been marked out to preserve for the ancient deities of the place an inviolate dwelling-place. For it has been the custom with all nations at

all times for any new settlers to set apart a portion of the newly acquired land for the divinities which haunt the woods and springs ; and so had it been done by Antinous.

At the holy march they paused, and Antinous said : " If the people know that the sacred grove is violated they will accuse thee of the calamity. Besides, dost not thou thyself fear the old divinities, for thou wast bred a barbarian ? "

The slave's eyes threw their shifting glances about and beyond his master, but his face betrayed no feeling as he replied : " I am but a man of means, and it is not for such as me to revere the gods—old or new. I hear and obey my master alone. It is for him to choose—but of a surety this way alone lies the food that will save the people."

Antinous followed the slave across the sacred boundary, and as he did so, to his own surprise, the same vague dread seized

upon him as after he had violated the tomb of the hero, and he wondered much that the old-world superstitions should have such power over a man of desperate courage and withal a philosopher.

When they had reached the verge of the headland the slave bade his master look over a lofty cliff.

“What dost thou see, O master?”

“Alas,” said Antinous, “there is nought but the salt water and the rough stones. My man of means is certainly distraught.”

“Dost thou not see the berries on the bush in the cleft of the rock?”

“Food enough for one small bird,” said the master.

“But the roots,” said the man of means, with a firm strong voice, “the roots will feed all thy people. Behold!”

With incredible agility and without the slightest fear, the slave clambered down the steep cliff. He stood for a moment on a

ledge of rock, and having carefully taken up his position he pulled up one of the shrubs by the roots. Carrying it in his teeth, he climbed rapidly to the top of the cliff and said to Antinous: "Look on these roots and again declare the end."

Antinous did as he was bidden, thinking more than ever that his slave was in truth mad. Then he suddenly started as he saw something white glisten in the stony soil that clung to the roots of the bush. He shook it and said hastily to the slave, with a voice hardly audible through excitement, "Silver !"

"Silver," was the reply, "and now choose, for the headland is full of silver ore. I have but shown thee the way in which the matter came to my knowledge long ago. But see this and this."

As he spoke Toxar moved away in various places stones and fallen branches and showed how he had followed the vein.

"But why didst thou not tell me before?" asked Antinous, when the richness of the rock was undoubted.

"I am but a man of means and I cannot work at the same time for two opposite ends. My poor wisdom knows no way to keep a city from luxury and corruption when its foundations rest upon a mine of silver."

"We must save the people," said Antinous, and as he spoke he saw, as in a vision, his city filled with every kind of wealth.

And the vision stirred up, for the first time since the night of his riotous banquet, the memories of former delights.

And they shook to the roots the firmness of his purpose, until he thought upon the happiness of his wife and child, and the vision passed.

He returned hastily to the city, and called together the starving people. They listened to him with dumb patience as he told them of the silver and indicated all kinds of re-

strictions and regulations to be placed upon the working of the mines as soon as the famine was subdued. To everything they assented willingly. Thereupon he enjoined them for the present to obey in every respect Toxar, who had alone made the discovery. Again they expressed their readiness to obey, and the assembly was broken up.

Men, women and children followed Toxar in a tumultuous panting throng, many tearing their garments and flesh in the underwood, and many fainting by the way. Without a pause they rushed over the sacred boundary.

But Antinous remained in his house, and at one time reflected on all the wild delights and excess of power that the silver could bestow, and then again he looked upon his wife and child with a wistful glance, and fell to wondering whether his faithful slave was not right in his warning.

II.

CHAPTER VI.

PRIDE OF TYRANNY.

THE silver saved the colony from famine, but, as the man of means had foretold, destroyed all simplicity of life.

The people began to clamour for an equal division, and refused to labour on the ground when it was known that the work of a few slaves in the mines could provide abundance of wealth for all. Idleness begat luxury and luxury begat dissension.

The city narrowly escaped becoming a prey to pirates, and the extremity of danger made palpable to all the necessity for a strong government. Wherefore in a short time Antinous assumed the tyranny, took possession of the mines, and held the people

in subjection by the aid of a band of chosen mercenaries, under the command of Glaucus.

He now found the man of means as skilful as he had boasted in the arts of government, and he took no step without his counsel. And his confidence and pride were much increased when he discovered after many trials that in most important matters, after a full discussion of the arguments, his own opinion conquered that of his minister. The slave was very wise, but the tyrant was still wiser.

When Antinous had set the city in order, and framed laws and settled the details of government, he found time to consider the change in his own condition through the sudden accession of wealth and power, and again he took counsel with his proved adviser.

“Let the king,” said Toxar, “declare the end and the slave will weigh the means.”

"I am well pleased," said Antinous, "with my life of the past five years, and I would fain continue the same moderation, but according to thy precepts a certain show of ceremony is natural and necessary for an absolute ruler."

"Then the king would combine the life of simple virtue with the state and magnificence of a tyrant?"

"Such is my present intention."

"Impossible," was the abrupt reply. For to the ill-suppressed vexation of Antinous his slave occasionally lost his usual deference of manner, and replied almost with the tones of a superior.

"What, then, does thy wisdom advise?"

"If my master would continue to live as before let him abandon the tyranny and flee to a distant land."

"That," said Antinous, "will I never do. I love this city more than my life."

The slave looked upon him with his

curious shifting glances and said, "For thirty years my present master lived a life of unrestrained pleasure—even from infancy—is it not so?"

"Granted," said Antinous, irritated at the man's frankness.

"And for five years only my master has lived a life of virtuous simplicity, under the spur of constant labour?"

"Under strength of will and fixity of purpose," said Antinous proudly. "But thy tongue is free—say on, as rudely as thou wilt."

"Therefore," said the slave, "methinks the thirty years will out-weigh the five years, and with boundless wealth and power at his command my master will find a life of virtuous simplicity dull, tedious, empty, and unendurable. If, then, the end is virtue, it is high time to flee."

"Flee—I will not."

"If the end is lust of dominion and variety

of pleasures, then it is better to remain in the tyranny."

"I will attain both ends," said Antinous with scorn.

"Hereafter the king will remember the warning of his most devoted slave," said Toxar.

There was that in the tone and look of the man which angered Antinous, and he eyed him and said: "Thou art a prophet of evil omen."

"All my masters," said the slave with perfect calm, "have perished in the fulfilment of their desires."

Again Antinous searched in his eyes for some sign of faithlessness, but found none.

"Thy advice," he said at last, "has dispelled all my doubt. I will prove to thee and to the world that I am no weakling, to be frightened by words and old saws."

"Then it appears that my advice has led in an opposite direction?"

"And not for the first time," replied Antinous, "but opposition clears the mind, and thou hast done well."

The man of means bowed his head as if with submission, and said with his usual apathy, "I am but the perfect idea of a slave. Let the master command as he will."

Antinous looked upon him and said: "Mad thou mayst be, but certainly thou art a faithful servant."

Now it fell out even as the man of means had foretold. Little by little Antinous abandoned his simplicity of living. His house grew into a palace, and was filled with costly rarities, and his wants were again ministered to by a band of highly-trained slaves. Step by step all the outward habits of his old luxurious mode of life were resumed, although he still preserved and fostered the purity of his family affections.

But the more he returned to the outward show of luxury the more he felt, as his pru-

dent counsellor had warned him, the tediousness of this enforced sobriety of conduct. He began, in spite of his resolution, to contrast the simple innocence of his wife's affection with the burning passion of the women of Peirene, and the rustic coarseness and dulness of the colonists with the brilliant wit and wild outbursts of his former companions.

Hermione, with woman's quickness, soon observed his dulness, and set herself to invent new pastimes, and pressed upon him constantly the marks of affection in which he had formerly delighted. But her simple arts and childlike devices only served to mark the contrast between the past and the present.

In a little time Antinous discovered that his philosophy now rested not on reasonable preference but partly on obstinate pride and partly on the common feelings of common human nature. And whilst he still proudly

affected the appearance of moderation, his passions were eager to revolt and to return to the anarchy of unreason, and were only bound by the sacred ties of the hearth.

Thus the ruler, equally with his city, lay open to the first inroad of corruption.

Now it chanced that Antinous had sent Glaucus and his man of means to collect new mercenaries throughout the cities of Greece, for suspicious of himself he suspected others, and he had become doubtful of the good faith of those upon whom the city relied for defence. And when his messengers had returned with the men, and the old companies had been disbanded and dispersed, Antinous, to relieve the tediousness of idle days, asked Glaucus many questions concerning the present state of Greece, the revolutions in governments and the changes of opinion, and especially he inquired who of all the Greeks was most in men's mouths, thinking in his pride that the fame of his

own wealth would be the principal subject of envy and conversation.

"The Greeks forget easily," he replied, "an absent man and believe little in the wealth of a distant place."

"That I know," said Antinous, "and need no traveller to tell me. But who for the moment is the hero of our fickle compatriots?"

"They have no hero."

"What man then is the most frequent mark of their satire?"

"I do not recall any name."

"Dost thou tell me that for the first time in our lives the day's admiration or hatred of the Greeks is not settled on one head?"

"That I did not say," he replied with truthful reluctance, "but the name that is on the lips of all Greece is a woman's."

"Hast thou seen her?"

"Yes."

“And on what does her fame rest?
What is her city?”

“She is said to be a Persian, and the
most beautiful woman of her time.”

“And her fame?”

“Her fame rests on the madness of passion
she has aroused.”

“And what dost thou think of her? For
even before we became philosophers thou
wast always blind to the beauty and snares
of women.”

“The wisest law in our state,” was the
evasive reply, “is that which forbids the
entry of strange women of any rank, under
pain of death.”

“Is she then so beautiful and so dan-
gerous?”

“Such is the report.”

“Surely she cannot have fired even thee.
I am almost persuaded to make a voyage
to see this wonder myself.”

Antinous spoke carelessly, but his com-

panion replied with earnest agitation : " Think not of it ! She has already destroyed two cities. Nay, rather make thy laws more stringent and keep this pest away from us. She is the very soul of the corruption of Greece, and no man she wishes to entrap can escape her snares. Her delight is in her power, and I warn thee that she has already heard—not from me—of thy wealth and thy former life, and has openly boasted that she will defy thy law and bring thee to her feet. Let her not approach—rather famine, fire, and pestilence ! "

" Truly," said Antinous, laughing at his vehemence, " her power must indeed be great to give thy tongue such unwonted eloquence. How didst thou escape ? "

" Perchance because I was unworthy of her toils, but thou—I will say no more." And he went his way as if in anger.

The rumour of this woman filled the mind of Antinous, and he wondered if her beauty

and power were, in truth, so dangerous. The secret thought of his heart was that, but for the bonds of affection with which he was fettered, he would conquer this woman as she had conquered others. And when in the midst of his musings Hermione broke in with her mother's prattle about the child, Antinous began almost to believe that he had thrown away his life.

But shame seized him when he saw that without speech his thought had reached her heart, and as he looked on the fear and dismay in her eyes and saw how she clung to the child his heart melted, and he comforted her with tender words, and he vowed to himself that he would restore his city to the old life or flee away to a distant land, for he began to fear the tumult of his passions.

Intent upon this design, he sought out his man of means and said: "I will talk with thee as with a physician. As thou didst forewarn me, the thirty years begin to

devour the five years, and inflamed with the abundance of wealth my passions, like my people, ever threaten revolt. I have shown my strength of purpose—even to thee—since I assumed the tyranny and save in public display I have lived as before. But I am weary alike of the outward pomp and—to thee alone I say it—of the inward conflict.”

“Then,” said his counsellor, “it is high time to flee, for weariness is ever the beginning of defeat, and if my master is weary with standing still how will he bear an attack? Surely it is high time to flee.”

The reply angered Antinous, and he broke in: “I understand thee not with thy defence and attack, thy flights and thy standings. I am a free man and I choose, and what I choose is tranquillity. But thou—thou art a slave—with all thy wisdom—and thy spirit is broken, and thou knowest nothing of freedom and courage.”

“I am the perfect idea of a slave,” was

the meek reply, "and my spirit is broken ; but my master commanded, and I spoke as a physician of the mind."

Antinous was appeased and said : "Speak then again, but plainly. What dost thou fear for me ? What is my danger ?"

"Does my master command me to speak without reserve, even to the certain wounding of his pride ?"

"Thou—a slave," and Antinous was again angered ; "a slave wound my pride ? Impossible. Say what thou wilt."

"The king," said Toxar, "is weary at heart with the dulness of his life."

"Of the pomp and show, I said."

"Weary even," continued the slave, "of the perfect virtues of the queen."

"How dost thou dare ?" said Antinous still more angry.

"The king commanded——"

"To speak the truth, but this is plainly false."

"I ever speak truth to my master."

Antinous restrained his anger with an effort and said: "Thou hast pointed out the disease—in thy opinion; what is the remedy?"

"If the king desires quiet happiness and a life of rustic simplicity, let him flee with wife and child. If, on the other hand, the end approved is lustful pleasure and the wild caprice of power let him remain and await the attack."

"But what is thy own opinion and advice?"

"To the man of means," was the calm reply, "it is all one—virtue or pleasure, solitude or riot, the present queen or another for mistress—it is all one to the potter's wheel what is made of the clay."

"At last," said Antinous, "I have at any rate discovered thy opinion of thy master's strength of will. Thou thinkest that I cannot withstand opportunity?"

"No," said the slave simply.

"That I will prove to be false. But now—to be plain with me—what is this attack and this danger? Who is the enemy?"

"The enemy that ever since the world began has conquered the strongest men—a strange woman."

Antinous smiled scornfully, but his adviser continued placidly: "This Persian——"

"Ah! A Persian sayest thou?"

"This Persian to thy present queen is in passion as fire to snow; in quickness of wit as nimble lightning to creeping mist; in her love of power and cruel greed a whirlpool; and she is careless as the salt sea of the opinion of men and the breath of rumour. Above all she is the most beautiful woman alive. I have seen her—and to thee she is a strange woman."

"My man of means," said Antinous lightly, "is, it seems, a poet as well as a philosopher."

"In one word," he continued with eyes fixed in the air, and as if looking beyond Antinous to the future, "she is in nature the image of my present master, and yet besides this she is a strange woman."

"A Persian?"

"So it is reported; but such a woman is of no race. She is the flower of a thousand years' growth."

"Again a poet; it is not thy most cunning art. Speak plainly. Is she the same of whom Glaucus——"

"Surely," said the slave, "I also mean the Persian who calls herself Atossa, and who laughed at his passion so scornfully."

"Ah, I knew not of this. And she proposes to visit me?"

"She has heard of thy wealth and thy curious change of life."

"But does she not know," said Antinous, "that by the strictness of our law it is death

for a strange woman to put foot on our shore ? ”

“ The king she knows well is himself the law, and in her time, in spite of her youth, she has been wife to two tyrants. To the vulgar she is a mighty personage—the widowed queen of two great rulers. She is a strange woman only to philosophers and kings. She fears thy law not one whit.”

“ Most assuredly,” said Antinous, “ I will put her to the death, and show to my people once for all the power of my law and my strength of purpose. As soon as she comes—if she comes—I will but look upon her out of mere curiosity, and pronounce her doom.”

“ It were well with thy present intentions to enforce the law at once without delay, and without sight or speech of her.”

The man of means spoke almost as one in authority to an inferior, and Antinous said :

“ Thy present master is no foolish boy, but

a man who has seen the heights and depths of life in the noblest city of the Greeks."

"The trial will soon be made," was the rejoinder, "for I see already, if thou canst not," and he pointed seawards, "the ship that bears the breaker of thy peace."

"Begone, then, and look to the present safety of this Persian wonder."

And in the heart of Antinous the longing for a new life of wild delights broke out as fresh as a spring in a desert, and all the virtues seemed dull and weary.

And as he watched the distant speck shape itself into a ship he chafed at his fetters, and thought no more of flight. His only trouble was the fear of disappointment, and that this lauded queen should not deserve her praises. Glaucus was no lover but of the chase, and Toxar—a gaunt slave with a broken spirit. What, he pondered, could they know of the real power of woman?

CHAPTER VII.

A FREE WANDERER.

FOR a long time Antinous remained motionless, gazing on the sea. His thoughts rose and fell and changed from gloom to light as fast and variably as the waves beneath cloud and sun.

He listened to the dull heavy blows of the sea upon the shore, and felt an irresistible longing for rest and tranquillity. Hermione and her child seemed to pass before his eyes set in a vision of rustic happiness, and for the moment filled his mind with calm content.

Then he looked again on the growing ship, and instantly the vision faded, and he wondered if by some fated accident the vessel was bearing to him the madness of love. He gloried in his beauty and strength and reckless courage, and boasted to himself that

no man had ever surpassed him save in opportunity.

"If perchance," he murmured, "she were my equal," and forthwith he shaped a woman unlike any he had ever seen, and most of all unlike Hermione. If it so chanced he would crowd the little space of life with pleasures and glories. And the moments rushed swiftly past as he sowed the sea with imaginings.

Suddenly, however, a noise from the harbour told him that the ship had reached land, and the rude sounds from wood and iron and the hurried shouts of seamen and soldiers shattered his meditations, and made him laugh bitterly at his folly.

Then again his mood changed as he thought on the perturbation of his friend and the warning of his slave. He clenched his hands with fury at the shameless audacity of this stranger. A blaze of anger and pride burned through his heart, and for the first time he was seized with the lust that is only possible

to the untrammelled tyrant—the lust for the most cruel torture. “If,” he said aloud, —“and no woman can reach such a height—if she pleases me not.”

As he spoke the man of means stood before him and began: “The Persian who calls herself Atossa——”

“Has she dared?”

“She has broken thy law, and is in thy power.”

“Take her from her attendants.”

“This command was anticipated.”

“And lead her to my new judgment-hall.”

“This also.”

“Seize her ship, and let not a man escape.”

“It is done.”

“Then before sunset not a trace of this bold wanton shall be left. The very ship shall be burned to ashes.”

The man of means listened unmoved, and

his silence somewhat abated the fury of his master.

“Lead the way,” he said. “Let no man follow or stay within earshot. Thou art strong enough, if need be, to slay a woman. Take this dagger.”

The slave took the weapon and twisted it in his scarred crooked fingers. Never had he seemed so utterly devoid of all feeling save blind obedience.

They entered the hall, and the slave closed the massive doors. From the further end a woman richly clad advanced to meet Antinous.

Her manner betokened surprise and annoyance, and when she was within a few paces she began abruptly, as one accustomed to command: “How comes it, if thou art the ruler——” She paused, struck dumb by the cruel curiosity displayed in the eyes of him she addressed.

“This is indeed my city, and within its

gates no living thing can question my power or break my laws."

Antinous looked upon her narrowly, and in spite of her royal apparel and shining gems and gold the woman shuddered at the coldness of his words.

"And didst thou — thou," continued Antinous slowly, "think in thy heart to play with me?"

He spoke with the utmost contempt, and turning to the man of means said: "Surely this is some servant, some slave of thy vaunted enchantress. Her tawny skin comes from the labourers of the field, and even her fear cannot dispel the memory of the blazing sun. This is no queen, but a rustic. Yet, now I look more nearly, she is slighter in form than a peasant, and her eyes beneath these masses of black hair and close-set brows shine with some power. Surely if this is she, it is with her eyes she has ensnared more feeble men, But for me thy warning was

utterly unneeded, and she dies the death." He turned to the woman and said sternly: "Why didst thou come hither? Knowest thou not that it is death for any strange woman to enter these walls?"

"I," the captive whispered, "am the widowed queen of two great rulers; widowed by misfortune in my earliest youth. I seek a place of safety, and I heard——" She looked from master to slave and from slave to master, and in her fear forgot the story she had devised.

"For all that," said Antinous, "to me thou art but a strange woman, and unless thou canst turn my purpose thou diest the death according to our law."

She felt that she stood on the very verge of life, and she drew a deep breath and tried to recall her courage.

"Give me," she whispered, "a brief space to prepare for death."

As she spoke she cast on the ground her

heavy outer garment, and Antinous could find no fault in the beauty of the form around which the soft Eastern robes hung as lightly as the mists that hide a vanishing goddess.

She bared her head, rested a moment with folded hands, and sighed heavily as she murmured: "Ah! Life, Life!" The voice was gentle as a child's and, in spite of its sadness, marvellously pleasant.

Suddenly she raised her pallid face and looked from Antinous to the slave. "Is this man to be my slayer?" And again she shuddered.

"He does my bidding," said Antinous.

He gazed upon her intently, and his voice revealed the slightest tremor of indecision.

On the instant the fear of the woman seemed broken. She looked Antinous full in the eyes and said: "I ask only one favour. Bear with me for a few moments whilst I forget the folly of my quest, and then let thy slave strike quickly at my bidding. I would

fain pass from life to death on the wings of pleasure. No Greek am I, but by birth a free wanderer. Is it granted?" She spoke in soft pleading tones and the voice had now lost its sadness and was still more wondrously enticing.

Antinous was silent with astonishment. The woman had changed before his eyes from slave to queen.

"Is it granted?" she whispered.

Antinous called upon his pride, and looked beyond the Persian as he spoke with forced roughness: "Thou must die—and quickly. As for choosing the moment, choose when thou wilt—before the sun turns to descend."

"Before the sun reaches its height," she said fearlessly, "my life shall be broken—if thou wilt." The last words were gently whispered.

Suddenly the man of means broke in with the harsh voice and tones of authority with which he sometimes irritated Antinous.

“Will my master allow this woman to cast her spells about him? These wanderers have strange charms, and for those unused to them”—he spoke with superiority—“dangerous.”

“I believe not in charms and spells—as thou well knowest.”

The slave again bowed his head with his usual submissive meekness and said no more.

Antinous turned to the Persian: “What canst thou urge in thy defence?”

“Nothing. I knew thy law and I have forgotten my story.”

“Then surely”—the glamour of the change seemed to have lost its power—“thou must die.”

“But first,” the voice pleaded, again tinged with sadness, “I may take a last draught of pleasure?”

“What pleasure canst thou find within those strong walls? Dost thou wish again to look on the sun and breathe the air from the sea?”

"I take no pleasure," she said proudly, "in sun and air. I am no simple rustic. See ! This is my delight !"

The man of means made a slight movement as if he would again advance and speak, but on a look from his master he stood still.

The Persian began to sing in a strange tongue a low chant, with a rhythm unknown to the ears of the Greeks.

And as she sang, first of all she weaved mystic curves with her arms, which flashed uncovered by the waving robe as she threw them back with gentle undulations. Then her feet began to glide to the music and at last her whole body was drawn into movement by the song. Her face flushed and her eyes shone with quickened life. She looked fearlessly on Antinous and spoke to him with every gesture of unknown delights and unimaginable pleasures.

Suddenly, without a moment's warning,

she stood still and cried to the slave :
" Strike ! "

The man of means raised his dagger and looked to his master.

With a rapid eager movement Antinous stayed his arm.

" Thou wouldst not destroy such a wondrous life," he panted.

The Persian looked in his eyes and read her victory in unmistakable glances. Then the blood fled from her face and she fell heavily on the floor, senseless and motionless.

" Monster ! " said Antinous, " thou hast frightened her to death with thy dagger."

" The queen," said the slave, " is overcome by the sudden passage from uttermost fear to boundless joy. Shall I use my skill as physician—or wilt thou let her die—thus ? "

" If she dies—thou also diest on the instant."

The man of means put his hand on her heart and said : " Her life flickers with fear

and hope. Let her awake with her own people about her."

Antinous hastened to do his bidding and instal the company of the Persian in the most magnificent apartments of the palace.

Thus was the life of simplicity for ever shattered.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DOOM OF HERMIONE.

THE Persian speedily recovered the fulness of health and beauty, and it was reported to Hermione and the city that she had come to claim the sacred rights of hospitality established between her ancestors and those of Antinous.

So great was the love of Hermione and so strong her simple belief in the good faith of her lord that through many weary days she looked with confidence for the departure of the Persian and the return of happiness. She was ready to believe anything rather than doubt Antinous, and in the end her eager desire to be assured of the truth which she would not question destroyed the last shred of hope.

With grief at the continued coldness of

her lord and with vain striving in innocent efforts to please him as of old, which only served to heighten the subtle charms and graces of her rival, Hermione had become well-nigh sick unto death.

Woman-like she was vexed when she saw how the lines of care and sadness had marred her beauty. She summoned to her aid the man of means, thinking that a skilled physician could preserve the health of the body against the grief of the mind. He found her with tearful eyes watching over the sleeping child and trying in vain to trace the father's likeness in the young face. She sighed as she remembered how easy it had been in happier days, and before she observed the slave at her side she had forgotten, in the rush of bitter memories, all care for her beauty.

"Oh, man of means," she said, "often and often has Antinous told me that if one only declares to thee an end, thy wisdom will be sure to find means for its accomplishment.

May I try thy skill, for I am much in need of help," then she added, with reluctant hesitation, "in the matter of my lord?"

"Many things," he replied, "are beyond the power of any man, but my skill is at thy command save for one thing alone. I may devise no means to injure Antinous."

"Ah, me! Sayst thou so, indeed? And thou dost not know, with all thy wisdom, that to save Antinous any trouble I would gladly enter the murky under-world. Nay, to injure Antinous could never be my object."

"And yet," came the bitter rejoinder, "many a woman, since the world began, has sent her lord to the grave with less incitement to anger than thou hast suffered."

"That I will never believe," she said with obstinate faith. "Antinous has done me no wrong, nor ever will, and I only am at fault in my unworthiness if he seems to tire of my companionship." She was angry with herself for saying even this much to the slave, and

continued : “ And only this day he spent three long hours with ~~me~~ in the heat of the sun.”

“ And only this night,” was the cruel answer, “ he ~~has~~ spent three long hours with the Persian in the coolness of the moonlight.”

“ It is false,” she cried in the agony of shame. “ He only converses with the Persian on the management of her ~~wealth~~. He has often told me how much her affairs are in need of a wise counsellor.”

“ Wilt thou see for thyself how these affairs are arranged ? If thou wilt promise not to injure Antinous——” Her tears stopped his words and he muttered to himself, “ Let her see ; in this way perchance will my master’s object be best served.”

After a moment’s hesitation Hermione was conquered by excessive desire of ending her present uncertainty. She gently embraced the sleeping child and said to Toxar, “ Come, have no fear for thy master.”

The slave conducted her, unobserved of any,

to a deep shade cast by a black tree near the apartment where Antinous was alone with the Persian. Every gesture Hermione could see through the door, left carelessly open to the night, and she was so near that she could hear every word. The open door gave her confidence and yet she clung to the tree with terror and listened with strained attention.

The Persian was reclining on a soft couch and near her stood Antinous. His hands were stretched out as if in entreaty, his eyes burned with passion, and his lips were half opened with breathless desire.

"I vow," he said, "that I never knew love till I saw thee."

"In Peirene," she replied, "Antinous is still remembered for the strength of his passion and the victims of his love."

"Pleasures and delights I have known in abundance, but I swear that the madness of love I never felt."

"In Peirene," she replied, "thou art still

more famous for thy unshaken devotion to the simplicity of Hermione. Thy virtue has long since passed from a jest of the players to the wonder of the age."

For a moment the memory of the past and the image of Hermione made him hesitate.

As she clung to the tree for support her heart beat wildly with hope.

But the hesitation which filled Hermione with joy kindled in the heart of the Persian a blaze of jealous anger. She stood up hastily, moved towards an inner door, and with flashing eyes and set teeth said to Antinous, "Know this, that I will never share thy affection with another. I will have no divided love. If I remain, wife and child must depart. Choose!" Still he hesitated, and one woman's heart leaped with joy and the other's with fury.

"They must depart never to return."

"Thou canst not mean——" Antinous whispered, still a little under the dominion of nature.

"What can I not mean?" Again he was silent, and he thought that she had never looked so beautiful as in this overpowering passion of jealousy.

"I fear not," she said, "to speak my thoughts, and this matter shall be quickly ended. Listen! This very night Hermione and the child shall die, or thou shalt never see me more."

"This is wanton cruelty," he said, "and against nature."

"Dost thou speak of cruelty and nature to me? Art thou a free man or the slave of a dead past? Choose!"

The living passion conquered.

"This night," he said, "they shall die."

As he spoke a wild cry struck their ears. The Persian drew back afraid and Antinous murmured: "It is but some evil bird of night. Have no fear with me."

She repulsed him and said, "Come back when thou hast gained thy freedom."

Not till she heard her own doom and the doom of her child from the lips of Antinous himself, did Hermione know how crushed and broken was her spirit. Then she gave the moaning cry which had startled the lovers, and gasped to her companion: "Take me away!"

The man of means led her to her apartment, and the mother fell in a stupor beside the sleeping child.

When she had recovered her senses under the skilful care of the slave, he said, "Lady, it is thine to declare the end. I am but a man of means."

"The end," she said calmly, as she heard the old catch-word at which she had so often laughed with Antinous, "the end—the end is death." She looked into his eyes as if even from him she would win some sympathy, but only saw the restless fluttering glances as of old. His coldness gave her courage.

"Hast thou no drug, O man of means, that

will make me—and the child—sleep away our lives ? ”

“ Surely ! ” said the man. “ I know many such, for I am a skilled physician. And when they told me of this sickness, I came prepared to give thee sleep. See—this much and in a moment ye will win the sleep of death.”

“ Mingle it for me,” she signed to him.

“ Willingly,” said the slave, “ there is now no better way to attain thy desire.”

He prepared the drug, and even as he finished an attendant bade him come to Antinous.

With trembling hands Hermione hastened to take the drug from his hand. And first she gave it to the half-awakened child and then with a heavy sigh drank the rest to the last sip.

Before the man of means had reached his master, mother and child had passed through the gates of sleep into the sunless land of death.

“And she, too, is dead,” muttered the slave, as he went on his way, “my sweetest mistress, for whom I well-nigh forgot my hatred of the Greeks—and my duty to my master. Ill luck has ever attended every one set over me—and yet Antinous lives in love and hope.”

CHAPTER IX.

ANTINOUS AND THE MAN OF MEANS.

ANTINOUS had summoned his man of means to strike away the fetters which bound him to his old life.

In the madness of his passion for Atossa, he had determined, regardless of nature, at once to carry out the behests of her cruel jealousy. He felt no pity and feared no remorse.

As he mused on the tediousness of his past life and all its dull childish simplicity he wondered that he could so long have degraded his being to the level of a rustic, and his heart swelled with pride as his thought wandered from the patience of his former endurance to the audacity of his present resolution. He felt that he had attained the summit of the wisdom of philosophy—to be

no longer a philosopher. He had conquered nature and habit and rejoiced in the frenzy of lawlessness.

In the midst of this unbounded elation the man of means entered.

"Man of means," said Antinous lightly, "I have often for my pleasure tried, in many ways, to astonish thee and to find thy wisdom and ready obedience at fault. Now, at last, I have my opportunity."

"It is thine to declare——" began the slave in his wonted manner.

"Look, then, in mine eyes, and if thou canst, stay for a moment that restless fluttering of thy glances. Thou canst not? Well, then, look as thou wilt, but listen."

"I hear and obey," said the slave simply.

"This night," said Antinous slowly, "I abandon the life of moderation for the life of excess." The slave made no sign, and the master continued: "I love to madness this passionate Persian, and I can bear

no longer with the dull virtue of Hermione."

The slave listened unmoved, and Antinous, with firm voice and angry gesture, exclaimed abruptly, "Therefore this night thou must find means to destroy Hermione and her child."

The slave showed no surprise and replied quietly :

"They are already dead !"

"What sayst thou ?" cried Antinous, astounded and breathless as if struck by a sudden blow.

"The lady Hermione," said the slave, "heard her doom from thy lips—didst thou not hear her cry ?"

"Ah !" Again the shriek of the supposed evil bird seemed to ring in his ears.

"And when she had heard her doom, she at once obeyed thy command—to the letter."

"Dead ?—and the child ?"

"Dead ! Thy mistress, O master, was a poor

piece of nature's own making. She could not, like a man of reason, change her affections to match her lot. Thou, in thy time, hast had many lives ; she had but one life and one love. She was ill-mated to thy quick variable-ness. Therefore she hath slain her child and herself."

"Without a word to me ? One word might have changed death to banishment. Methinks I did not mean death. Thou knowest how quickly my mood can change."

"Quickly, in truth," said the slave, with a flash of his insolent superiority that shamed his master into firmness.

After a pause Antinous affected to give a sigh of relief, and said calmly : "Perchance death was better than years of grieving. They are dead—thou art certain."

"With my own hand I mixed the fatal drug."

Glad of some object and occasion for a display of anger, Antinous cried to the slave,

"How didst thou dare—without my command?"

"I, too, heard the command which my mistress obeyed," said Toxar with humility.

"And how didst thou dare to pry into my doings? Was it thou who brought Hermione to discover my secrets?"

"My master had long since made clear the end and I but found the means. Mother and child will trouble thee no more. Slay me, too, if it please thee."

The words were spoken with the utmost humbleness, but there was a smouldering fire in the man's eyes, and a twisting of his crooked fingers which for the first time made Antinous doubt his fidelity. In a moment, however, the man of means recovered his wonted deference and stood in quiet dejection before his master.

Antinous forgot his sudden suspicion and said: "True, the deed was mine, and thou, as thou sayst, art but a living instrument.

Leave me till I have conquered this weakness.
I never yet feared life or death."

As soon as the slave had gone, in spite of his boast, the tears of regret blinded the eyes of Antinous, and for a brief space his heart was filled with shameful sorrow.

But in a little while he again became true to his vaunted pride, and fresh from his victory over nature he went to glory with the Persian on his freedom.

Yet it seemed to him, as he passed through the night, that faint pallid shadows struck off from the dead floated before his eyes and made them dim.

But whether or not the shadows were born of a disordered mind, as the newer philosophy teaches, certain it is that Hermione and the child lay dead whilst Antinous and the Persian discoursed of the delights of the future.

CHAPTER X.

A BROKEN SNARE.

IT was given out publicly that Hermione and her child had died by an evil chance through eating a poisonous herb. A magnificent funeral was accorded to them, and Antinous attempted further to delude the common people by concealing for the time his passion for Atossa.

He had begun to love the power of his tyranny, and with the aid of his inexhaustible silver mine he planned all kinds of ambitious projects for the glory of his city.

And he feared a popular revolt before his power was well established, for Hermione had been much beloved of the common sort, and her untimely death had caused profound sorrow throughout the colony.

The bearing of Glaucus since the catastrophe

had rendered the tyrant suspicious of every one, for he plainly disbelieved the story of the poisonous plant, and suddenly announced his departure. In vain Antinous reminded him of their life-long friendship, and affected to treat him with the utmost honour and confidence. Glaucus met all his advances with gloomy silence and hardly concealed repugnance. He refused to stay for the splendid festival which Antinous had devised for the public espousal of the Persian, and declared that on the first opportunity he would sail to some distant unknown land.

In the meantime, however, an incredible chance intervened, which like a flashing thunderbolt lighted up the scene, and the characters of this history, and dealt a death-blow to the innocent whilst sparing the guilty.

The Persian soon discovered that Antinous, in spite of his passionate love for her and

his cruel sacrifice to her jealousy, would brook no further interference with his will. Alike in matters great and small, he asserted the mastery, and refused to be ruled by his mistress. And she was enraged with bitter disappointment, for to sway men at her caprice was the fountain-head of all her passion. Now that he had gained her love Antinous seemed ever to assert the superiority, and to treat her almost as the simple slave of his passion.

She cast about in her anger to set another in his place, whilst to hide her plans, she treated him still with the utmost extravagance of fondness.

And her eyes fell upon Glaucus as the most fitting successor to his former friend, both in the tyranny and in love. She well remembered his sudden outburst of passion, and she was persuaded that she had only to make a sign and he would again fall at her feet. She viewed with delight his coldness

to Antinous, and ascribed it to the jealousy of a rival.

She devised a cunning scheme by which, as she thought, she could lay bare the heart of Glaucus without danger, and one day, in the absence of Antinous, she followed him secretly by a thickly-wooded path to the border of the sea, where he was wont to brood in solitude, like Achilles in his anger.

She came upon him suddenly and said :
“ Antinous is dead—slain in a mutiny when the people learned that he had cruelly done to death Hermione and her child.”

He looked upon her with astonishment as she continued :

“ Wast thou alone ignorant of his sin and his danger ? ”

Still he answered nothing.

“ And if,” she said with a passionate impulse, “ thou art still my strong, brave lover, thou mayst thyself gain both the tyranny

and the destined queen of the tyrant. But time presses."

For a moment his passion returned, and she saw her victory in his eyes. She held out her hand. "Time presses. Art thou willing to rule with me, and over me? I never loved Antinous. I have never loved but thee."

The extravagant falsity of the words was hidden from Glaucus by the madness of love, which again overpowered him. For the woman had the very witchcraft of enticement.

"Do with me as thou wilt," he cried ;
"I am thy slave."

"Thou wilt obey my commands even to death ? "

"For thy love I will do any deed."

"Then," she said, "make all my story truth, as already it is true in part. Thou hast but to declare that Hermione and her child were slain by the command of Anti-

nous, and thou canst lead a revolt, in which Antinous shall lose his love, his power and his life. Be bold and delay not."

"Is, then, Antinous not dead?"

"Dullard," she said, "this day he shall die. I framed my story to test thy courage and worthiness. Do as I bid thee and thou shalt gain the tyranny, the love of the people—and mine."

"I must slay my friend?"

"Even as he slew his wife and child. That is truth."

Horror conquered even love in the simple nature of Glaucus.

"That will I never do; and I will never look on thee more."

She looked upon him with contempt, and said fiercely:

"If thou wilt not slay him, this day shall he slay thee."

"Nay, I will give him warning of thy treachery, and thou shalt suffer."

The threat was spoken with vehemence, and sudden dread clutched at the heart of the Persian.

She hastily determined to act on the device to which in all times false women have had resort in the like case.

She hastened back towards the palace, and her alarm was increased when, after a few paces, she saw Toxar returning by the same path. She feared that he had heard her temptings, but he made no sign, and seemed busied in collecting herbs.

She summoned Antinous with the most urgent entreaties, and breathlessly told him that his friend was false and had attempted to gain her love.

“How?”

She laughed.

“He is not the first—to love me hopelessly. Nor is he the first to seek to join love with vengeance.”

“Vengeance?”

"On thee ! He urged me to join in a plot to take thy life."

"Surely this is some error—he was my only friend."

"Friendship," she said, "is nothing to love ; and the man loves me to madness. I feared his violence both for me and thee."

"He did not dare to threaten ?"

"He told me for certain that this very day the soldiery would revolt. One life for two—his for mine and thine—that is my counsel."

Anger and jealousy blinded Antinous, and he said :

"I will but take counsel with my faithful Toxar."

"Thou wilt take counsel ? But if thou lovest me, the man deserves instant death. Dost thou not believe what I say ?"

"I will but speak with my slave."

The Persian trembled, but feared to make further parley.

The slave was summoned.

"Toxar," said Antinous, "if any one should threaten to take my life and my power and my queen, would he not deserve instant death?"

"Certainly."

"Even if he had been my friend?"

"If he were presently guilty, if the guilt were proved, and if the king's mind were firmly fixed."

"If—always if."

"If my master is certain not to repent—when too late—as in a recent case. But who is this new victim?"

The slave spoke in the manner which always angered his master.

"Glaucus—and this," pointing to the Persian, "is the witness. Now what sayst thou?"

"Perchance there may be some error—a little delay and close questioning by thyself would explain the mystery. If it is permitted to

me to speak in favour of thy former friend and my constant enemy——”

There was again that in the slave's voice which made his counsel drive his master in the opposite way.

“Shall I,” said Antinous, “take the word of a slave against that of my queen?”

“Hereafter may it please the king to remember my warning?” said Toxar.

“Canst thou still talk with a slave on a matter that concerns thy life and mine?” said the Persian, afraid of further delay. “Had I had the strength of a man, with this hand I would have slain thy false friend, although he loved me more, it seems, than thou dost.”

“Man of means,” said Antinous, “destroy this enemy; and see thou do it under colour of some mischance, for he is much beloved of the soldiery.”

Before nightfall it was noised through the city that Glaucus had fallen, when hotly

engaged in the chase, over a high rock into the sea, and was drowned.

And again, out of policy, Antinous honoured the dead with a magnificent funeral, and he moved the people to tears by eloquent lamentation over his friend.

And from that time forth the Persian thought no more of displacing Antinous in power or affection, for she feared the man of means. Yet could she never discover whether he had been witness of the failure of the snare she set for Glaucus.

CHAPTER XI.

NEW GODS.

AFTER the supposed treachery of his friend, Antinous lived in constant fear of rebellion, and he tried in succession all the arts which tyrants have devised to keep their people in subjection. He gave magnificent shows and feasts, and flattered the populace by affecting to restore the appearance of a democratic government. He selected his mercenaries with the greatest care, and by extravagant pay and occasional licence he induced them to submit to a most rigid discipline. Nor did he forget to use the opposite method both with his subjects and his guards ; he relied on fear sometimes more than on reward for fidelity, and many an innocent victim suffered torture and death at his hands.

With great pomp and ceremonial he made

Atossa his queen, and lived with her most deliciously. He abandoned himself to all the excess which the passion of the East and the ingenuity of Greece could devise. His silver mines gave him abundance of wealth, and the years of restful quiet had restored his energies and renewed the zest for delights. He rejoiced in his freedom like a beast of the woods released from captivity. His messengers ransacked the earth for new pleasures, and that which had been a colony of rustics and the home of the virtues, became in a little while a nest of vices and unutterable corruption. The tyrant was delighted to see, according to the word of the philosophers, that his city was in reality but a larger image of himself.

Two things only ever checked the impetuous torrent of pleasure. Sometimes without warning in the glare of the feast, the faces of the dead shone before his eyes, and he heard above the jests and mirth the voices of vanished love and friendship, and the

banquet became as lifeless as rotten leaves. Even the passion of Atossa was powerless against these gloomy memories, which vanished as they came suddenly and without any discoverable cause.

And with equal unreason the fear of the future would force an entry in the midst of the most profound security. On one of these occasions of suspicious fearfulness, Antinous took counsel with Toxar, and bade him use his utmost skill to secure a sure mode of retreat in the event of any accident to his power from secret rebellion or open hostilities. And well did the man of means obey the command of his master. For with great labour and ingenuity he prepared on the side of the headland, remote from the natural harbour, a basin large enough for a swift galley. And the only approach was by winding steps cunningly made in the rocks, and the only entrance to the secret path was through a brazen door in the centre of the

palace. And a galley was built and laden with treasure, and as soon as the work was done it was reported that it had been abandoned, and the slaves who had toiled on the task were slain for their idleness. And neither from land nor sea could anything be perceived save the ruins of a huge sea-wall and a massive water-gate, and no living man knew of the hidden vessel and the secret path, and no woman save Atossa. And for greater safety it was forbidden under pain of death for any to approach the headland on that side, because it was reported that a still richer vein of silver had been discovered in quarrying for the abandoned harbour.

Of this door of escape Antinous alone carried the key. And that all might be in readiness for instant flight, within the palace was always a sufficient company of seamen, who were practised in their craft by turns in distant and perilous voyages.

But Antinous was not yet content, nor

could he secure his mind from the hidden pangs of unfounded fear.

Again he took counsel with his unfailing adviser and said :

“It is well for a tyrant to have a door of escape, but it is better to have no need. Is there no way to keep the people and the soldiery in such dread that they would never dream of revolt ?”

“There is the strong hand for the people ; and for the guards, leave to me the selection of their captains and the mode of discipline.”

“To thee ? To a slave ?”

“Whom canst thou trust more than me, now that Glaucus has proved a traitor ?”

“True,” and Antinous checked his anger. “To thee I will leave the ordering of the guards ; and every day thou shalt give me a full report and I will order thee.”

“A former master of mine, also a tyrant,” said Toxar, “taught his guards by my means always to obey without question the bearer

of his signet ring. And many times armed with this ring, I—a slave—gave most strange orders, for my master was cruel and wrathful beyond belief. Yet the men always obeyed the ring. Nothing, indeed, is more easy to teach than obedience.”

“And did this master of thine also perish miserably?”

“Most miserably.”

“Did his guards not remain faithful?”

“Faithful to death.”

“What, then, was his fate?”

“He was poisoned by a jealous woman. The story——”

“Say no more,” said Antinous. “I will use this device, and thou shalt train the men in perfect discipline.”

“Even as I,” said Toxar, “am the perfect idea of a slave.”

“But for my people,” said Antinous, “I like not the strong hand, and I would have my city the greatest haunt of travellers and

strangers. I shall take delight as of old in their stories, and they shall carry my name to the ends of the earth. Know that I love my city and my power."

"Then must the master put his trust in gods and in oracles. Much have I thought on the puzzle, and this seems the only answer."

"But, as thou knowest, I believe neither in gods nor oracles."

"Therefore thou canst so much the more easily make use of these kinds of fictions. If thou believest not, but thy people do believe, then thou thyself canst interpret the signs and omens. A perfect tyrant can best govern his people by superstition."

"Then should I become as it were a god, being the creator of gods and prophecies."

"Thou becomest, O king, a living god."

"But will the people be so simple as to follow after new gods, and to pay regard to omens not hallowed by age?"

“The only difficulty, and that is not great, is in the beginning. There is no folly that a people will not believe in the name of religion. I have myself travelled much, and I have talked much with other travellers, and I could tell thee a multitude of incredible superstitions held in honour of the races of men. Nothing is too foolish, too cruel, too unnatural for a religion.”

“Perchance amongst the barbarians, but not amongst the Greeks of our day.”

“The Greeks of our day are even as other men if a tale is devised to their liking. Even Antinous, the mighty tyrant and the scorner of nature, cannot be altogether free from the terrors of the unseen. Even he would not dare to violate a tomb.”

“Ah ! who told thee so ?”

“I judge because he fears to meet death and the dead. Am I a physician of the mind, and yet can I not read what stands pictured in the eyes ?”

"I fear nothing living or dead." But even as he spoke the faint shadows that he dreaded passed swiftly before him, and unwillingly he raised his hand to hide the sight. They vanished, and he said fiercely, "I fear nothing—tell me how to make others fear."

"The old deities have for the most part fallen into neglect, and can hardly be made to serve thy purpose. But of late many foreign religions have become popular in the cities of Greece. It were well to get strange gods to inspire thy oracles ; and through them thou shalt rule over thy people and attract a multitude of strangers."

"The scheme is worthy of thy skill. But how and whence shall I get my gods?"

"On this matter also, O king, I have pondered much, and thus shalt thou do. Send forth in opposite ways to the very ends of the earth two expeditions. And let the one bring back a man of kingly

presence, but as strange in bearing and as different from the Greeks in voice and manner as can be found. He shall be thy chief priest, and thou shalt put in his mouth prophecies which thou canst craftily bring to fulfilment—accidents to life and wealth and the like. And let the other expedition bring back a woman of great beauty, but also different from the Greeks; for, as thou well knowest, there is great power in strange beauty. She shall be thy priestess. And the pair shall be wedded, and raise up a priestly race, and they shall live altogether apart from the people, and altogether under thy command. In this manner may a religion and a power be founded which shall endure far beyond the life of the king.”

Then said Antinous: “One thing thou hast forgotten, my most wise and crafty man of means. Will not those who bring back the priest and the priestess reveal the secret?”

"That is most easily avoided in many ways."

"How?"

"Death."

"A poor reward for the discoveries of new gods."

"If thou fearest the effect on the soldiery, there is another excellent device. Let the king by his own wisdom, or if it seems unworthy, through the wisdom of his man of means, first discover the wonderful gifts of prophecy in the strange captives, which had escaped the notice of the captors. And to this end let thy messengers bring back a number of curious treasures and creatures, and a score of men and women. And they shall be brought in appearance for thy shows and festivals. Thus will no one, not even the leaders of the companies, know that they were sent in quest of new gods."

And Antinous approved in every respect of Toxar's plans. And in a short time two

bands, well armed and appointed, were sent out, one to the farthest limits of the North and the other beyond the pillars of Hercules, to obtain all kinds of rarities and, most of all, the beginnings of a new religion, for Antinous and his city.

And he told all that he had done and the inner meaning of his quest to the queen ; and she was well pleased, for she hoped also to increase her power, and power she loved above every delight of the land.

CHAPTER XII.

VELDA.

MANY months passed, and Antinous began to fear that his good fortune had failed him, and that his expeditions to the North and to the South had been destroyed. At length, however, a miserable remnant in a battered ship returned from the North. They entered the city at dead of night, according to the commands given them, in order that no one might see the rarities which they brought, before they were shown to the king. As soon as their arrival was announced, Antinous dismissed his attendants, and bade the man of means bring in the wanderers with their treasures.

“No treasure have they brought, living or dead, save one woman.”

“Then,” said the queen with petulance,

"it will be easy to choose a priestess. But why did they not bring more as they were commanded?"

"The rest whom they captured have died on the way of grief and despair—so it is reported—but the best has survived. See, she comes."

The king and queen gazed with eager expectation towards the door of the spacious hall in which they were waiting.

First of all there entered straight from the ship, the leader of the expedition, worn past all recognition with hardship and danger. He saluted his ruler, and asked whether the woman should be at once introduced in her barbaric dress and unadorned, or should wait to be fittingly appareled.

"Instantly," was the reply.

The leader beckoned to his companions, and they brought in a rude litter made of woven branches and covered with a rough cloth.

"We have obeyed thy commands in every way, and added precaution to precaution, that our captive might not be seen."

"Release her," said the king, as the men set down the litter in the centre of the hall.

"With permission, O king, let the woman be still bound, that she may not lay violent hands on herself or others."

Antinous laughed as the queen shrank away, and said: "Keep on the bonds if need be, but let us see her instantly."

The leader removed the cloth and laid open the litter, and at first they saw only what seemed a bundle of strange skins in a motionless heap.

"I trust she still lives," said the king.

"It is often thus with her, and often she will only eat and drink with force, and seems to seek death. And thrice she tried to escape, and she and her companions slew many of my men. Then we bound them

fast, even as thou seest she is bound ; but the others died, the last two days ago. This one, however, is still strong, as thou shalt soon see, but stubborn and fierce beyond belief."

As he spoke, with the aid of his men, he set the captive on her feet.

The king and queen gave a cry of surprise, and the man of means passed his hand rapidly over his brow, and then remained impassive and motionless, but gazing intently on the captive.

In every respect the appearance of the prisoner was fitted to excite the wonder of the beholder. She was tall and large of limb, but withal so well shaped in form, that her stature seemed uncommon only in comparison with the more common mould. Her hair was in colour like gold in the gleam of the moon ; her eyes were as stern and blue as the glitter from an Eastern sword, and her glances quick and

piercing. Her face was of a strange beauty, and seemed by nature ruddy, but pale with care and passion.

She was clad in a loose garment made entirely of soft, light skins. Her arms and the upper part of her breast were bare. Her wrists and ankles were bound in such a way as to admit of little movement.

"Beautiful and majestic as Minerva," said the king.

"Say, rather, wild and strong as an Amazon," said Atossa. "I am afraid of her. See how she glares upon me." And in truth, the eyes of the captive seemed flaming with loathing and contempt as she looked on the Persian.

Next the barbarian turned to Antinous, and gazing on him fixedly, she held up her fettered hands and struck the ground with her foot as if in unspeakable anger. Then she poured forth a torrent of words that seemed but broken noises to the Greeks.

But all who saw and heard—though they knew not the meaning of the words—could easily divine that they were burning with wrath and threats of vengeance.

“I would give untold gifts,” said the king, “if any one would interpret the oration of the prophetess. What does she say?” he asked of the leader.

“I know only a few simple words of her tongue, and I cannot follow her rapid utterance. She is angry and indignant.”

“That can I tell without an interpreter. How sayst thou, O man of means? Is not her speech full of wrath and indignation? But, perchance, in thy endless wisdom, thou knowest also the tongue of this Northern priestess—for my priestess she shall be.”

“It was my mother’s tongue,” said Toxar calmly, “and I have not yet wholly forgotten it.”

The king turned upon him with joyful surprise and eyed him curiously. “True,

thou art also of strange blood, and to one skilled in the signs of race there are many points of likeness between thee and the woman, in spite of the lines and seams on thy face, and thy gaunt form and limping gait. But haste to tell us what she says."

Toxar bowed his head, and with his usual simplicity replied, "I hear and obey, if it is thy will. But she speaks only wild words of little import, and methinks it were better to give her rest and quiet before we demand her story. Women of her tribe bear captivity but ill. Let her alone if thou wouldst have her live."

"As thou wilt—take thou charge of her. If I have waited for months, I can well wait a day."

III.

CHAPTER XIII.

TOXAR AND VELDA.

As soon as the captive found herself alone with the man of means, she said, "How comes it that a man of our race seems in league with these breakers of hospitality and stealers of the women of his own blood?"

"I am a slave."

"Thou a slave? With thy hands and feet unbound—a slave without chains? How can this be? Where is thy courage and spirit?" The words were spoken with rapid vehemence, and doubt and wonder were mingled with belief and indignant scornfulness.

"My spirit is broken—as broken as these fingers," and he held out his crooked hands.

"Can a man of my race live to say these words?" she said with unveiled contempt.

"I am no more a man of thy race. I am only a man of means. What another bids or desires, I find the means to attain."

She looked on him as if to search him through and through, and then, with head thrown back and eyes and voice strained with anger, she cried: "Then I command thee, thou broken-spirited slave, to find means—at once—to restore me—unharméd—to my native land."

"I am a man of means," he replied, "to Antinous, the king of this city, and he has far other designs than to give thee thy liberty. I am appointed thy guardian and teacher, and I obey only my master."

She looked upon him with utter bewilderment, and then said. "Perchance, thou fearest to be overheard, and wouldst meet guile with guile."

"No one in this place understands thy

tongue, and there is, besides, none to hear."

She paused and looked, and was lost in astonishment, and then inquired doubtfully :

"Thou art in truth to be my guardian ?"

"I am."

"And my teacher ?"

"Thy teacher."

"And what wilt thou teach me ?" she asked, her fury fading into simple curiosity before the unbroken calm of the man.

"That thou shalt know hereafter. But in the meantime, there is much to be done, and first of all I must unloose these fetters."

"Ah !" she sighed, "thou art kind, and in spite of thy words thou wilt save me."

The slave at once set free her hands and feet, and the captive shook her limbs with joy.

"It is better with thee thus."

She bounded away from him like a wild creature, and cried : "Never again shall any one

bind my living body." As she spoke she seized a short curved sword that hung on the wall—a curious weapon brought from the far East—the gift of Atossa to Antinous.

"Keep the weapon if thou wilt. But if thou wilt do exactly as I bid thee——"

"Thou wilt help me to escape?"

"Escape," he said, "will involve much trouble and danger, and above all, we must lull suspicion with delay. Swear to do exactly as I bid thee, and I will do all I can for thy freedom. And slave though I be, my power is great."

"I knew," she cried, "that no man of my race could betray a woman of his own blood."

"Do exactly as I bid thee and thou shalt suffer no harm. Trust in me and thou shalt return safe to thy forests. If thou triest to escape alone, thou must surely die—and die dishonoured—and is not freedom, even after a little delay, better than death—and shame?"

She was conquered, and her eyes filled with tears. Then Toxar said to her : " The weapon in thy hand is a precious gift, very dear to the king, and he will at once miss it from its place. Give it to me, and I will get for thee another."

After a moment's hesitation, she gave it back, and said simply : " I will trust thee. And thou too, poor slave, shalt go with me, and my father and his companions will treat thee with equal honour, and thou shalt be again a free man with shield and spear. Dost thou not long to be again in the woods, far from these cramping walls ? "

He looked as if he understood not, or cared not at all.

" I am but a man of means and my spirit is broken." Then, as if rousing himself to the needs of the present, he added : " But do thou exactly as I bid thee, fearless of wrong."

" Surely," thought the captive at last,

"the man is mad, yet he is certainly my guardian. If I trust him with one hand I can keep the other ready for death." She bitterly regretted that she had given up the weapon, and looked around for another, but found nothing. "Give me back the sword," she cried.

"Not this," he said simply, "nor any if thou obeyst me not. Follow me!"

Toxar led her into an inner chamber and called to her aid women slaves. Then he left her and bade her sleep without fear.

He at once sought Antinous, who had awaited his return with impatience. "Our priestess, man of means, is in form and beauty and divine wrathfulness a goddess. But methinks it will be hard to tame such a spirit to speak the wisdom of a false oracle. How sayst thou? Will she in time do as she is bidden?"

"She has already promised," said Toxar, "to do exactly as I bid her."

"This almost passes belief, O man of wonders. Dost thou indeed speak truth?"

"I speak ever truth to my master."

"But how hast thou so quickly bent such a wild forest barbarian?"

"By deceit and falsehood—in the manner long approved of the Greeks. I first of all gained confidence by speaking incredible truth and then the rest was easy. And yet I very nearly failed," continued the slave with humility.

"How?"

"She seized, when I released her, the crooked sword from the wall, but I again beguiled her with soft words and promises. And now she has perfect trust in me, but I obey my master alone."

"Thou canst indeed speak with a wonderful appearance of truth and wisdom," said Antinous, as if he were himself in doubt of his slave's sincerity so easily had he made admission of his use of deceit and false-

hood. "But what didst thou say and promise?"

"I promised that she should return after some delay, safe to her native land, if she obeyed me in everything. And to get back the weapon I promised her another."

"And wilt thou keep thy promises? She is of thine own blood."

"I am but a man of means, and I do as my master pleases."

Voice and look, tone and gesture were the same as ever, and his master doubted no more.

"A living instrument can have no guile in the hands of the craftsman," said Toxar as if the doubt had been spoken. And he left Antinous wondering over the unheard-of humility and resourcefulness of his slave.

CHAPTER XIV.

TELEMOS.

AFTER many days the other expedition returned from the South, and at dead of night the leader and the remnant of his followers were admitted by the man of means to the capacious royal hall. In the midst of the company was a tall figure completely hidden from the neck downwards in an ample Grecian robe, and above the head and face were covered with a thick veil. "Have ye, too," said the king, "only brought back one captive, and no other rarities, living or dead?"

The leader saluted his ruler with confidence and said: "We have brought thee, O king, from the ends of the earth a man utterly unlike any ever seen in Greece."

"Unveil thy wonder."

"Is he chained?" said the queen.

"He is not bound," replied the leader, "for in his case fetters are useless. At first, when we came upon him and his companions, they fought with fury to escape, and his companions were all slain in the fray and the man himself grievously wounded. But we tended him carefully, and, as if affected by our kindness, he became quiet and peaceful, and now he does all that we desire at the least sign. He is in truth a wonder. But see for yourselves."

As he spoke he carefully removed the veil from the man's face, and at a sign the man himself threw down his heavy cloak and stood before them in a simple Grecian habit.

"See!" said the leader bringing his captive to a large lamp made of many cunningly-devised branches throwing light on every side. "Is he not indeed a wonder?"

As soon as the veil had been withdrawn Antinous had started with sudden astonish-

ment, for around the man's head was a golden circlet in size and shape like that he had taken from the violated tomb. And in the centre was a shining jewel.

"Strange chance," he thought, "if this captive should be of the race of the ancient hero." But as he looked more closely the circlet and the jewel seemed but barbaric ornaments and his thought foolishness, and he said to the leader :

"Such a man ye might have bought for me in any island of the Greeks where the sun shines with its full strength. Surely he is but an Asiatic at the best and no rarity."

"Nay," said the leader, "he was reared far from the land of the Greeks, and no Greek, save perchance Odysseus in olden times, ever saw his people. Be not deceived by his Grecian dress, but look again more narrowly."

"The man," said Antinous, "is well knit,

large of frame and well favoured and regular in countenance, but no wonder amongst the men of Greece. Ye have loitered and idled and would beguile me with a strange tale."

"Look again, O king. Dost thou see nothing strange in the man's face and eyes?"

"His eyes are full and black, and seem to betoken much intelligence; but many Greeks have eyes like his, and the curse of all Greeks is too great cunning."

The leader, in spite of the king's apparent disappointment, seemed to take pleasure in trying to excite the curiosity of the onlookers. He turned to the queen, and said with obsequious deference: "Perchance the eyes of the queen will be quicker to detect the marvel, for there is a marvel."

"I see nothing strange in the man himself," said Atossa; "but in the middle of the golden circlet he wears a wondrously strange and beautiful jewel. See," she said to the king,

“how it shines and changes colour in the light.”

To describe the jewel would be a matter of inexpressible difficulty, for it shone, as it were, at the same time with the gentle fire of the ruby, the richer purple of the amethyst, and the sea-green of the emerald, and the colours flashed and interchanged and mingled their glories in the manner of the opal, but far more wondrously. Grace went out from it, and majesty shot forth from its almost divine splendour. The eyes of Atossa were dazzled by the sight, and to her the beauty of the jewel was almost terrible ; but Antinous answered calmly :

“I was looking on the man, and not on his ornaments. Yet the jewel does indeed seem a wonder—like to an opal, and yet something different ; but a wonderful jewel does not make the wearer wonderful.”

“But this jewel,” cried the leader, “is not only a wonder, but makes a wonder also of

the man himself. Look more closely. The man is very peaceable. Look, but touch not, for that he cannot bear."

Antinous again remembered the ancient hero as he advanced, and observed that the circlet was curiously graven; but when he came closer to the prisoner his eyes were fastened on the jewel. He looked steadfastly, and then held up his hand; but the leader checked him with a sign and said, "Did I speak truth, O king?"

"How did ye contrive this device? for to me it appears almost as if the jewel grows in the brow of the man, and certainly it is not held by the gold."

"This time thou hast hit the mark, O king; for the wonder lies in this. The jewel is as much a part of the man as his eyes and hands. This we discovered when he fell wounded amongst his dead companions. Thinking him, too, slain, I tried to take his golden circlet and shining jewel. Then I saw

at once that they were separate, and I took away the circlet, but the jewel seemed to be fastened in the skin of the man's forehead; and as I touched it to pluck it forth the man groaned and lifted his hand in defence. And I looked closely and saw clearly—as thou shalt see, if the captive will—that the jewel was part of the living man.”

He looked to the prisoner and said, “Wilt thou allow the king, thy present master, whose servant I also am, to see for himself this living wonder?” The man bowed his head, removed himself the golden circlet, but answered nothing.

Antinous looked at the setting of the jewel, and could no longer doubt the word of the leader. Then he called to the queen, but she was afraid, and whispered, “It is some evil charm. I cannot.”

“The man,” said Antinous, “is no monster, but almost god-like in appearance. Look, then, O man of means; thou at least

art not wont to be afraid to do my bidding. Look nearly. Surely this is no wonder to thee. Explain to us the mystery or the deceit."

Toxar advanced and turned his restless glances on the jewel, and eyed the man narrowly, and surveyed his whole bearing with the utmost care. Then he said simply : "I have never seen or heard of aught like this. For of a surety the jewel is part of the man."

"Then," said Antinous, "if thy wisdom is at fault, O greatest of travellers, he is indeed a wonder, and our only hope is that he will explain to us himself. He seems to understand our tongue. Can he not speak?"

"Alas," said the leader, "the only matter for regret is that the man seems dumb. He either cannot or will not speak since the battle in which he was captured, though in the fight both he and his comrades shouted their war-cries and spoke as it seemed articu-

lately. Methinks he is really dumb since his capture. But he quickly learned our speech, and will do as we bid him without the least backwardness. It is indeed wonderful how readily he understands all that is said. This we have proved many times ; but, alas ! he is dumb."

"And what thinkest thou of the jewel ? And why does he wear the gold ?"

"As for the gold, perchance he was a king, or perchance it is for the protection of his wonder. For it is so contrived that it forms, except in front, a kind of shield, and is as it were a setting. But as for the wonder itself I cannot divine. Methinks sometimes it is his god, for all the barbarians worship precious stones, and this is the most wonderful of all."

"If," said Antinous, "the man, as thou thinkest, bears with him his god, perchance he is dumb from disdain, and will only speak to the kings of men. He seems to treat thee

and thy companions with the complacency of kingly contempt. I will speak to him." He turned to the captive and saluted him, and said : "O wonder of the age, wilt thou deign to explain this mystery to me, for thou must dwell long in my halls, and if thou art indeed a king or a god I would fain treat thee with befitting honour."

The man looked on the king unmoved, but answered not a word.

After waiting in vain for a reply, Antinous said to Toxar : "Take him away, and tend carefully to all his wants. I will talk further with his captor."

And when they had departed Antinous and the queen asked many questions of the leader regarding the man and his jewel. But he could learn nothing more, and he was vexed to find that the captive was in all other respects but a man of common nature, and, though gifted with extraordinary intelligence, seemed to have besides no special power.

He dismissed the leader, and said to the queen : " This living jewel will make an excellent oracle, and the man's dumbness will make him so much the more tractable soothsayer. What thinkest thou, my queen of delights ? "

" It is surely a charm, and I am fearful of some evil. Thou knowest I have no courage. "

" Yet once at least, " said Antinous, " thy courage was astonishing—the first time I saw thee, and thought in my foolishness to put thee to death. "

" That, " she said, " was the courage of despair and the love of life. But for daring I have none. I was born for love, and love is my breath. "

And Antinous embraced her with renewed fondness to comfort her for her weakness, and he knew nothing of the inmost feelings of the woman, and that in spite of her cowardice and love of life she could on a fitting occasion rise to the utmost heights of daring for her purpose.

CHAPTER XV.

TELEMOS AND VELDA.

DAY by day Velda, the captive priestess, did as she was bidden by the man of means in the desire of gaining her freedom, although he gave her not a weapon, according to his promise, but ever soothed her with soft words and hopes. She stood unmoved as the statue of a goddess in the midst of the people, and without understanding a word that she uttered, pronounced the dooms ordained by Antinous. And a terror fell upon the crowd as the cruel words fell from her lips, for it was soon known that all her prophecies were sure of fulfilment.

And day by day the man of means exercised all his skill to unveil the mystery of Telemos, the god-bearer, as he had been called in jest by Antinous, but he discovered

nothing new for all his labour. The man seemed quiet and peaceful, and understood readily, and did as he was bidden with easy dignity, but he spake no word. His captors, under pain of death, had been enjoined to say nothing to the people of the living wonder, and, attended by Toxar, he was allowed to go about the city, the golden circlet and the jewel hidden by a fillet. He passed for one of the multitude of strangers specially honoured of the king. And at first it was rumoured that he was a priest from a distant tribe, who had been banished in a rebellion and, like many others, sought refuge in a city famous for its hospitality.

Antinous, however, had determined to carry out his plan for a hereditary priesthood in its entirety, and, impatient of delay, he commanded Toxar to devise a great festival in which the wonder of the living jewel should be displayed to the people. He considered it an advantage that the man was dumb,

for, without fear of contradiction, the jewel might be endowed with all kinds of wonderful qualities, and would form an excellent foundation for the new religion.

The man of means, however, still counselled delay, and said :

“All that this woman of my race has done has been through the promise of freedom. I fear that nothing will persuade her to wed any man not of her own blood, and she will never live in prolonged and certain captivity.”

“The man,” said the tyrant, “looks a king and ever wears a regal circlet, and every woman is by nature unstable and fickle.”

Even as he spoke the memory of Hermione belied his words, and at the same time the image of Atossa made him fearful of the truth. But they passed away as the man of means said abruptly :

“Not the women of my race.”

“Dost thou speak of obstinacy of nature,

thou slave of the broken spirit? Nay, if needs be, we will break her, even as thou wast broken." And Antinous was angered.

"This woman thou wilt never break. I was but a boy, and her courage is full-grown."

"Try, then, thy guile in the first place; but let there be no delay, or I will try my force."

The next day, when, as usual, the fair-haired barbarian questioned Toxar on her escape, he answered:

"Escape for thee alone is well-nigh impossible."

"But thou wilt come also?"

"Nay," he said, "my life is done, and my spirit has once for all been broken." She tried to give him courage, but he continued, "Thou must seek the aid of another."

"But who is there in this dreadful place? I loathe the sight of all its people."

"The king," said Toxar, "has another

captive, by name Telemos, destined to act as his priest. He shall escape with thee."

"Is he of our blood?"

"I know not his race, but he is of open heart, and full of courage. Trouble and danger bind more closely than blood."

"Let me see him and hear his story before I put my trust in him."

"Alas!" said Toxar, "the man is dumb. The slaughter of his kinsmen and his captivity seems suddenly to have taken away his speech."

"How knowest thou, then, that he will desire to escape?"

"Breathes there a captive in this world, whose spirit is not utterly broken, who would not gain his freedom?"

Velda sighed heavily and said:

"Bring him to me. I will read the truth in his eyes."

Toxar at once brought to her his strange prisoner and said to him in Greek:

"This is thy fellow-captive, of whom I have told thee the story and whom thou hast once heard prophesy."

The man looked with friendly deferential glance on Velda and inclined his head as if to make an honourable salutation.

"This," said the man of means, "is the first token of respect he has shown to any in this city. What dost thou think of him?"

"He is as unlike these lying Greeks," she said fiercely, "as this painted woodwork is unlike the green branches of the forest. Him I will trust. But, alas! of what avail is a dumb man?"

Telemos looked on her with friendly assuring glances, but spoke not.

"Perchance," said the man of means, "he is only dumb by design, and thou canst make him speak."

"Alas!" she said, "he will not understand our tongue."

"I know not," said Toxar, "yet his eyes look as if he knew thy meaning."

Velda addressed him, and asked him his story ; but, as usual, he answered nothing.

CHAPTER XVI.

PRIEST AND PRIESTESS.

THE captives were often brought together by the man of means, but he told them nothing of the king's further designs. And to Velda's angry inquiries when and how she could escape, and of what avail was the dumb man, he answered only that time would show and that she should suffer no wrong. And of Telemos he could learn nothing, for the man himself would not or could not speak, and his captors had taken him, as it were, by chance from a remote and forgotten island, and Velda knew nothing of the jewel or the circlet, for they were always hidden by a broad fillet.

In the meantime Antinous, always impatient of delay, and vexed with the shortness of life, determined forthwith to make the

god-bearer his new priest, and to wed him to his priestess. And he bade the man of means prepare a great festival for the display of the god-bearer's jewel, and he laboured to invent the most extraordinary and astounding qualities wherewith to endow the living gem, in order to beguile the people to his liking.

In vain the man of means protested that, owing to the infirmity of Telemos and his strangeness of blood, Velda looked on him as altogether inferior, and that without full and free consent the women of her race would never wed, even were it to escape death. Antinous insisted so much the more, and threatened force and torture if guile and fair-speaking failed.

"I will myself," he said, "now manage the affair, since thou hast failed me—doubtless softened to useless pity by the ties of supposed kinship."

"A perfect slave," he replied, "is as pitiless as the sea, and his only kinship is

with the sword of his master ; and I am, without comparison, the most perfect idea of a slave since the world began."

"Truly," said Antinous, "methinks thou art proud of thy slavery and thy unquestioning obedience."

"Neither pride nor pity have I ; and no more than a dead dog do I feel for any one affection or hatred ; nothing do I hope for and nothing do I fear. My spirit is broken and I find my only rest in obedience. Slay me if thou art not satisfied, or sell me and my obedience to another, and I will serve him ; to me it is all one."

"Hast thou then for me no affection and no regard ?"

"I speak only truth to my master, and have I not already answered ? What more wouldst thou have of a slave than slavish obedience ?"

"Yet," said Antinous, "for all thy boasting I sometimes mistrust thee. Look to it

that in this matter thou act only as my interpreter to this stubborn barbarian. Say not one word and look not one look beyond the meaning of my utterance."

The man stood unmoved and began as was his wont: "I hear——"

But Antinous was angered and said fiercely: "If thou art false in one tittle I will make thy spirit seven times more broken than it is. And mark this—I will have no more of thine affected equality—nay, superiority. If thou wilt be a perfect slave do my bidding without pretence."

The words of Antinous fell upon the slave as lightly as a gentle breeze plays on a rock. He showed not one sign of fear or remonstrance, or the slightest concern, as he said 'with his usual simplicity, "I have still, it seems, something to learn. I will study my looks, as do the women of the East, and learn the trick of seeming affection, if such is the master's will."

“He would not dare,” thought Antinous, “to point at the queen. Nay, it is but the old proverb, and I have done the man wrong and wasted the golden hours.” Then after a pause he said aloud: “I did but prove thee once more, even as I might try the edge of a well-tried sword or the point of an arrow. Come! I believe thee. Thou art a perfect slave and I will do thee no harm.”

“As the king pleases,” said Toxar.

They went together to Telemos, and with him Antinous made no delay, but said abruptly: “Long enough hast thou enjoyed my hospitality without return, yet will I bestow on thee a greater favour than before. I will give thee to wife the beautiful barbarian Velda, my renowned priestess; and thou too shalt become a priest, and ye shall be held in the highest honour, ye and your children.”

The man answered not, but a sligh

flush of agitation showed that he had understood the words of the king.

"What! will not even this gift drag from thee a word of thanks?" The man remained silent, his agitation passed and he looked on the king as if he regarded him almost with contempt. And Antinous was again angered and said: "This is enough of silence. Doubtless the priestess will give us greater entertainment with her barbaric volubility and vehemence."

And the three went to Velda.

As soon as she saw the king she stood up and looked upon him with such fierce hatred that the plan he had devised to use his skill as an orator fell to the ground, and he said to Toxar: "Waste no time with this caged lioness, but say as I bid thee. Tell her that this very day she shall wed this man."

"The king, our master," said Toxar in the barbaric tongue, "bids me tell thee that

this very day"—he made a moment's pause as if to call the attention of the king—"thou shalt wed this man." And he pointed to Telemos.

If Antinous had ever doubted the good faith of his interpreter, now at least he knew that his command had been truly rendered.

The eyes of the untamed barbarian flamed with scorn and anger and for a moment she was breathless with wrath. Then looking on the slave with wide eyes, she said: "Thou hast deceived me. But I will no longer be a helpless captive. From this day, if I cannot obtain death more readily, I will neither eat nor drink."

When Antinous was made aware of the purport of her answer he affected to laugh and said: "She will the sooner bend to my will as her strength fails. But for all that she shall wed my god-bearer this very day. Speak to her again in her swallow's tongue."

The slave did as he was bidden and Velda was the more enraged and said: "Tell thy master that a coward knows nothing of courage."

As she spoke she glanced hurriedly round the chamber as if in search of a weapon, and then seemed to measure her unarmed strength against that of Antinous and his slave. But Toxar was huge of stature, and Antinous, when he saw the fierce light in her eyes, set firm his foot and half drew the dagger which he had always worn since the death of Glaucus.

At once she saw how vain a struggle would be, and feared worse dishonour before she could take refuge in death. And as her glances wandered hither and thither, like those of a wild creature in the toils, they fell upon the dumb captive, the man she was commanded to wed.

He was gazing upon her with silent admiration and she thought quickly to herself:

"He too is in league with them, and is glorying over the spirit of her he hopes to conquer." She turned fiercely upon him and said: "As for thee—thou dumb thing—know that if by one look or sign thou dardest say in thy dumb-show one word of this proffered shame, I will slay thee with my bare hand."

"What does she say?" asked Antinous with curiosity. "What are her first words to her future lord? Methinks it is strange love-making. And see, the man seems abashed and, by all the gods! his eyes are full of tears. Drive home the thrust, O man of means, and tell me and this dumb Telemos word for word what she said."

The man of means was about to interpret as he was bidden when suddenly Telemos checked him with a sign, and then to the amazement of all spoke in rapid broken words to Velda in her own tongue.

"It seems," said Antinous, "that the

dumb can also speak this swallow's chatter. Quick, tell me what he says."

"These," said Toxar, "are the very words : 'They have deceived thee—not I. For I honour thee above all women. Put thy trust in me—I will save thee.'

"These," he repeated, "are the very words, faithfully rendered."

CHAPTER XVII.

A NEW RANSOM.

WHEN Velda heard her fellow-prisoner speak to her in her own language, with such honourable and fervid devotion as the barbarians of the North are wont to show to the women of their race, and when she saw the truth in his every look, she stood silent, utterly lost in wonder. And suddenly, as the words of the man penetrated the depths of her soul, she was overpowered with impetuous gratitude. She had borne, with fierce courage, her captivity, and had seen, undaunted, her hopes fall away from her grasp. Yet had solitude and distrust begun to eat away her bravery, and the threats of Antinous had brought her face to face with death.

And now her heart was filled with a tumult of strong barbaric feelings, such as grow not

in crowded cities, but only in pathless deserts and tangled forests. She knew not what to say, or how to speak even a word of thanks, and with a passionate impulse she seized the hand of Telemos and carried it to her lips. And his face flushed with joy and radiant courage, as he felt her unspeakable gratitude.

“Methinks,” said Antinous, “these barbarians already love one another, and will need none of our goading to the yoke. What sayest thou, O man of wiles and wisdom?”

“My wisdom is foolishness and my wiles are spiders’ threads to this man’s foot. I had begun to believe that he could articulate no word, and lo ! the man has learned my mother’s tongue.”

“Hold,” said Antinous, “it seems that my god-bearer would now address his speech to me.”

And at once Telemos began to speak in the dialect of the mother-city of the colony.

He spoke slowly and with a strange utterance, even as a barbarian who must think at every word in what manner he shall move his tongue and draw his breath, and yet he made no error that could be put down in writing.

"I offer myself," he said, "as a ransom if thou wilt send back this woman unharmed to her native land."

"It is not the custom of the Greeks," said Antinous, "for one prisoner to be the ransom of another."

"That I know, but thou hast only my body captive, not my will. Thou couldst not even command my tongue without my consent. But if thou wilt let the woman go I will give thee a priceless gift."

"The offer is strange, but thou art a strange creature. Say on—I will consider the matter. I have been in my time a philosopher, and a man of virtue and temperance, and I have been also the opposite for my pleasure. And I know—better than any—the trick of chang-

ing opinions in a moment. What wilt thou give me ? ”

“ The secret desire of thy heart.”

“ And what may that be, for I know not ? ”

“ Thy tongue says it not, but for all thy boldness thou art full of fear.”

“ I fear nothing,” said Antinous, “ nothing—living or dead—divine or human.”

“ Thou fearest to be robbed of thy city and thy queen.”

“ True—if that is fear.”

“ And if I will I can give thee warning of every danger better than all thy spies and all thy guards, and better than thy trusted slave. Let this woman go and I will be thy diviner, not, as was thy design, in outward show, but in ^{very} deed.”

“ Man of means,” said Antinous lightly, “ it is time for thee to drown thyself and give thine office to another. Yet give me, for the sake of old custom and habit, one

more word of advice. Say, is not a true diviner—mark, a true diviner—worth more than the ransom of a fierce barbarian ?”

“Let the man be proved—a true diviner is beyond price, but among the Greeks a crafty liar is not uncommon.”

The man of means spoke simply, as if he would weigh the opposing arguments in an even balance.

The king looked upon Telemos intently, and then said, in a low voice, to his adviser : “This man is not like a deceiver, and for his dumbness he may have had good cause. Yet, what he now seems to promise is plainly against the order of nature. Captivity and love have doubtless shattered his reason. For all that, he may make the better priest, and I will treat him according to his madness.”

Then to the prisoner he said : “Give me proof of thy power and I will let the woman go, and thou shalt have ample time to prepare thy divinings. And to test thy skill

thou shalt wander through the city and pry into the hearts of my people. Then will I prepare a magnificent spectacle, as I before intended. And first, that it may not fail altogether, the woman shall speak the words put into her mouth, as meaningless to her as the blast to the trumpet. But as for thee, thou shalt declare by thine art what man and what woman in the whole city are most worthy of death for their secret crimes. And if thou canst prove that thy divination is just, this woman shall be sent back unharmed. But if, like a common soothsayer, thou sayst only words of double meaning and vague import, then—" here the king paused to reflect—" then thou shalt wed the woman and play the oracle according to my bidding. Dost thou consent ?"

"Thou sayst," said Telemos, "that thou wilt let this woman go if I bear thy proof."

"Most assuredly, O true diviner," said Antinous.

"Thou liest, and thou knowest that thou liest," said the prisoner sternly.

Antinous looked on him, astonished at his bold presumption, and then, with sudden anger, half drew his dagger as if he would strike the man dead. But Telemos eyed him with such courage that he thought it shame to strike an unarmed man.

"Come," he whispered to Toxar, "a king cannot brawl with a captive. And if the man proves a good and willing spy I might well, if he wishes, let the woman go. But methinks, if we leave them alone to solitude and nature, he will rather bid her stay."

"If," said Telemos again, "I prove myself to be a true diviner, thou wilt let this woman go?"

"If!" said the king, "if! Most assuredly."

"This time thou speakest truth—for the moment. See thou cleave to it."

The pride of Antinous again aroused his

anger, but he checked his words and left the chamber with the man of means, who carefully fastened the door from without.

And Antinous said to him : “ How comes it that the dumb can speak both the Grecian tongue and the barbarian ? And how did he so readily guess my meaning ? ”

“ As for the words, many men of no great worth know many languages—even as I—and that is surely no wonder of itself.”

“ But what sayst thou to his boasted divination ? ”

“ I know not,” was the reply.

“ Thou knowest not ? Dost thou, of all men, believe in divination—thou the deviser of my oracles ? ”

“ The world,” said the man of means, “ is large, and the people of Greece are but a small part of the tribes of men. And in times past it has been handed down that wonders have happened which to us seem incredible and beyond nature. And though

the tales of the past be not altogether true, yet, on the other hand, they may be not altogether false. And in every people under the sun there are diviners, and, perchance, here and there one has his gift from nature, or from the gods—if there be any gods.”

“I, at least,” said Antinous, “believe neither in gods nor oracles, save of my own making.”

“And I,” said the man of means, “am a broken-spirited slave, and thus deaf and blind to the higher mysteries—if there be any such.”

“Thy advice?”

“Watch narrowly—but believe not, unless the man tells thee some secret hidden from all men but thyself—even from me. So shalt thou be safe, and not be fooled by a trickster.”

“Man of means,” said Antinous, “what dost thou think of the jewel of my god-bearer?”

"That it is even such a sport of nature as the pearl in the oyster."

"It cannot, perchance, be the seat of some strange power?"

"I had looked upon it but as a stone; curious to see, but as senseless as the nail on the finger. But, perchance——"

"Perchance—what?"

"The thought is too foolish for utterance."

"Speak!"

"The jewel is perchance the gift of a god. But it is not for a slave to believe in gods; his soul is too earthy and corrupt, and, besides, deadened with too much obedience."

"If thou wilt unbare this mystery — so much is my curiosity aroused—I will set thee free, and give thee wealth and let thee go."

"Doubtless I will unbare the mystery, and take the heart from the puzzle, but for freedom, it is as useless to me as food to the dead. I live to obey. I have no will,

no thought, no wish, save for my master—for the time being.”

“Thou art, indeed, a perfect slave ; but why didst thou mar thy fine speech with the last words ?”

“For the time being ?” said Toxar. “Because, O king, I speak only truth to my master.”

“Enough of this folly. Let us return, and again question our captive. Now that he can speak he may well explain at once the nature of his power—if power he has. If he is but a common soothsayer he will hesitate and delay, and in any case we may learn something of the man. Come ! Let us return.”

CHAPTER XVIII.

HOPE.

As soon as Telemos found himself alone with Velda he spoke to her with vehemence ; and although sometimes he stumbled in his haste over the strange sounds of her language she readily understood the import.

“Thy father, with his host—I have learned it secretly from a new-comer to the city—is rapidly approaching. He has made allies of the surrounding tribes, and in a few days the combined forces will make an attack.”

“And then—freedom and vengeance !” she cried, and clapped her hands with delight.

“But the matter is not so easy,” he rejoined, “for the place is too strong by nature and art to be taken by a direct assault. And thy people know nothing of military engines, and their allies know not enough.”

“Then,” she said proudly, “they can wait

a month, or a year, until the city falls by hunger. Often have they done this before a walled place, and in the end left not one stone upon another, nor a piece of wood unburned."

"But thy friends have no shipping, and with the sea open and abundance of silver this tyrant can stand a siege for ever."

Velda's face fell, and Telemos hastened to add: "I have, however, hit upon a plan that is certain of success if only thou wilt trust me."

"I trust thee," she said simply, with frank open eyes.

"Trust me and grant me a little delay, for the case stands thus. I am a man whose kindred has been utterly destroyed by the caprice of this tyrant—him I hold guilty, and not only his servants. I am a man, and I would be revenged. And to make certain I have waited long, and thou mayst well wait a little."

"Revenge," said the fierce barbarian, "is a sweet draught for a god. I too would be revenged on these smooth, fawning Greeks. With mine own hand I would fain slay this tyrant and fire his city."

"But," continued Telemos with hesitation, "although at first I had thought only of vengeance, since I have known thee my purpose has partly changed."

"Surely," she said, "thou hast never learned pity from me?"

"To save thy life I would forego my vengeance."

"And I," she replied, "if chance favoured me, would not forego my vengeance to save my nearest kin, nor would they wish it." And she paced the chamber with clenched hands. "If," she added, "thou canst destroy this city think not of me. I shall die happy, burned in the flames or crushed by the falling walls. I hate these walls and this people."

"Listen ! Vengeance thou shalt have to the full if thou wilt wait a few days."

She looked upon him a moment with questioning eyes, and then at once fixed her mind. "I will wait—patiently—and will aid thee if I can."

"And wilt thou trust me altogether ? For I would secure thy safety as well as vengeance."

"Assure revenge," she said hotly, "and think not of me."

"I will think of both—but I may not unfold my plan at present, even to thee."

"As thou wilt," she said. "I have not yet earned thy good faith. It is not long since I poured out my anger upon thee."

"I honour thee the more for thy wrathful pride."

"When wilt thou begin ? Wilt thou tell me thus much ?"

"I have already begun, in the words I said to the tyrant a little while ago."

"And what didst thou say? I saw that he was enraged."

"That he lied——"

"That," she said, "was brave of a captive."

"But that I would prophesy for him."

"Ah! Yet I too have done it."

"I would only gain time and opportunity. I will explain hereafter. Hark! They again approach."

"I hear nothing," she said.

"Trust no one, not even this mad slave."

"Is he then mad?" she asked.

"Nay—not mad as thou meanest, but he is utterly unlike other men. But they come. One word more. To gain time I may tell them that thou hast consented?"

She drew back with sudden anger. "That thou shalt not say, even for a moment and for a known pretence, not to save my life. Never will I wed at their bidding. Never will I seem to promise for an instant—never! Never—tell them that, again and again!"

“ May I not tell them that if thou art left as free as before thou wilt consent——”

“ Never ! ”

“ Nay, listen ; only to say their oracles and do their bidding with speaking words that thou dost not understand.”

“ Yes,” she said grimly, “ I will be their raven, and one day I will bark when they bid me speak.”

“ They are close at hand. In a few days—if thou wilt trust me—thou shalt be free and this city shall be destroyed.”

“ And if,” she said, “ thou wilt give me life and freedom, and vengeance for my wrong, thou shalt be joined to my tribe—the bravest people on the earth. And in time, perchance, thou mayst forget the loss of thy kindred.”

Her face softened with womanly pity, and the kinless man sighed deeply as Antinous entered with his man of means.

“ O king,” said Telemos with dignity, “ thy

captives must bow to thy commands save in one thing."

"Explain."

"This woman will prophesy according to thy bidding, as before, and I will prophesy—according to truth."

Antinous laughed and said: "That shall be proved."

"Grant me only a reasonable delay to discover the secrets of the city."

"A reasonable delay I will grant. Thou thyself shalt appoint the time—always, as thou sayst, within reason—for the trial of thy skill. So far good—I am glad that ye have both learned obedience. And now say also what it is that ye will not do."

"I have spoken with this captive woman and I have seen into her heart. I would choose death rather than wed her at thy bidding."

Again the king laughed and said: "That

we will leave to nature and opportunity. In the meantime do thy prophesying, and if thou hast the courage, woo this untamed barbarian."

"I will prophesy—the truth. For the rest I do no man's bidding. I have spoken—ye may depart."

He made a royal gesture as if to dismiss them. Antinous stared upon him with angry wonder but restrained his wrath. "Before I go," he said, "I would fain learn something of thy secret."

"This day thou shalt learn nothing."

"And when will my prisoner deign——?"

"On the day on which I prophesy for thee—thou shalt learn, perchance, more than is thy wish of my power."

"Come," said Antinous to his slave, "for the present we will use gentle means. Take thou the soothsayer throughout the city, and let him discover its secrets or invent his tale. And look thou," he whispered, "if opportunity

arises, wrest his secret from him—if he has any secret.”

And the three departed and left Velda wondering over the words of her strange companion.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE LIVING JEWEL.

By the king's command the two captives were allowed still greater freedom than before, and were permitted to meet without the surveillance of the man of means.

Telemos, however, never appeared without the broad fillet, which completely hid the golden circlet and the living jewel. And in spite of their growing friendship he refused to disclose his plan, although he constantly assured his companion that it would certainly succeed. He encouraged her to talk of her life in the forests, the bravery of her kinsmen, and especially the rites with which a man of strange blood might on occasion be admitted to the tribe. And Velda every day discovered some new bond of sympathy, as the man's nature unfolded.

Yet at the same time she never saw him without a feeling of strangeness, and even of repulsion, which she could hardly overcome.

In their first interviews she had regarded the dumb gentle prisoner as altogether her inferior, and had pitied him for his misfortune and infirmity, but now their positions had entirely changed. Telemos spoke, without the least doubt or hesitation, of their escape after the destruction of the city, and he appeared to hold the king in the greatest contempt. As often as Velda ventured to express the slightest fear he laughed, as if the matter were not worth discussing, and began to talk again of the beauties of lake and woodland.

The quickness of his intelligence was astonishing, and she never ceased wondering at his perfect knowledge of her language.

"Surely," she said to him, "it was thy mother's tongue—and yet it sounds strangely in my ears."

"No," he replied, "I learned it entirely

from thee and this mad slave," for so he always called the man of means.

"It is wonderful—for I have heard these Greeks talk together for months and I hardly understand one word that they speak. But thou—without an effort—canst speak and understand both their tongue and mine. Tell me the secret of thy power."

"Alas," he said almost mournfully, "I fear to tell thee all the secret of my power—for that is but a small part."

"Thou dost not think," she said fiercely, "that I would betray thee, even by accident."

"I would trust my life in thy hands."

"I have long thought," she said, "that thou art different from the common race of men. Perhaps thy distant country is on the border-land of the haunts of the gods—and from them thou hast learned some wonderful secrets."

"I never heard of gods," he replied, "until I was captured by these evil men ; and their gods are made of their own foolish imaginings."

In this place there are certainly no gods, and in my country there were none. Plants and animals there were in plenty—some like and some unlike those in this place, and men and women there were—a small tribe—but gods there were certainly none, neither in sea nor air nor forest.”

“My country,” said Velda, “is full of gods.”

“How dost thou know? I would gladly see one of thy gods.”

“They are not often seen,” said the barbarian simply, “but sometimes they appear ; not the greatest—the wielder of the thunderbolt—but the spirits of the woods and the streams, who are more like men and women. I have seen them myself.”

“Thou? Tell me, then, what is their shape and substance?”

“It is not good,” she said, “to speak of such things. Yet if one day thou art joined to my kindred thou must certainly worship our gods—and I will tell thee a little.”

"Tell me their powers."

"They can do all kinds of things, beyond the power of man. They can move as quickly as the wind—unseen and unheard, if they will. And," here she whispered, "they can look into the very heart and tell the true from the false. They are terrible."

"Ah!" said Telemos, "in thy country only the gods can do that?"

"Surely," she said, "for once thou hast not understood—no man can peer into the heart of another."

"Wilt thou not tell me of the appearance of any one of them?"

"I was once," she replied after long hesitation, "hunting in the forest—for with us the women also follow the chase. And I lost my companions, and night fell, and I made for myself a bed of leaves and grasses beside a stream. The moon and the stars twinkled in the water, and I watched their images in a dark pool. At the head of the

pool, where the stream entered, were moss-covered stones, and lower down, where it became still and wide, was a bed of tall reeds and rushes. I lay quite still, and tried to listen to the splash of the water and the rustle of the leaves, and to look on things I knew, for it is not good to hear or see the spirits against their will. And suddenly I heard a strange soft gurgling sound, as if the stream were trying to laugh, and then I saw the face of a little old man come out from the bed of reeds and go in front of the image of the moon. And I shut my eyes, and when I looked again it was gone."

"And that was a god?"

"Surely!" And with growing confidence at his surprise and disbelief, "and I have often seen them."

"How? Tell me plainly."

"What they like best is to put on the shape of curious trees and creatures, and

sometimes they make themselves so like, that I have been deceived. But if any one dares to look closely and say charmed words, they always vanish into the air, or leave their hiding-place. I once saw a wood-spirit in a bush, and it seemed so gentle and friendly that I walked towards it. And even as I approached, it melted away and I found only the leaves and branches. But there was no foot-print of any other creature, and I knew it was a god."

"Ah!" said Telemos, "methinks in my country there were gods of this kind."

"I was sure of 'it," she said hastily, "and doubtless thy power—whatever it is—has been given to thee by some god. Tell me, if thou wilt trust me so far."

"Trust thee? Ay, with the utmost faith, but——" and he paused.

"But——? What is thy fear?"

"I would not make thee afraid. Friendship cannot live with fear."

"I know fear by name only. Tell me, lest I begin to distrust thee, and even hate thee," she said fiercely.

"Not much longer," he said, "can the delay be made, and therefore will I tell thee, although now I know at last I shall lose the happiness of thy friendship."

Slowly and reluctantly he unbound the broad fillet and showed to her the golden circlet and the wonderful jewel. And the jewel shone with the liquid lustre of a living eye, and, in the light of the sun, gleamed and glowed against the red gold.

And Velda was amazed at the wondrous beauty of the jewel, and said softly: "Now for the first time I understand how gems and gold may rule the world. Surely thou wast a great king, and thy craftsman wrought most cunningly."

"I was a king," he said sadly, "and the craftsman who made this jewel was doubt-

less a wondrous worker. And in this city I am more than a king."

"How can that be, when thou art a captive?" she asked simply, awed by the sad dignity of the man.

"It is hard to tell thee," he replied, "for to tell thee is at once to lose thy friendship. And yet it must be done."

"Keep thy secret," she said, "if thou canst not trust me."

"This jewel," he said, "even as the eye, is part of my living self, and with it I can see into the secrets of the heart, and know its meaning as easily as thou canst see the moving lip or hear the spoken word."

She shrank away from him stricken with horror and dread. "Fear me not," he said; "thou knowest how I honour thee—love thee!"

"And all this time," she cried, "thou hast known my inmost feelings. Would rather that thou hadst slain me. Oh!—shame—shame—not to be endured."

"Thy heart," he said, "is the bravest, purest heart that ever lived."

Her face flushed with anger and shame. "It was a coward's part, the work of a miserable spy, to win my friendship—my—alas ! the bitter, bitter shame—my very love—for thou knowest it—and yet not tell me of thy dreadful power."

Anger restored her pride and she struck her breast and cried : "And now look in mine eyes or pry into my heart and see how I hate thee for this treachery."

"Alas !" said Telemos, "I feared to lose thy friendship, and I hoped that, perchance, in time——" And the man's voice was choked as he felt her scorn.

Her anger began to give way to pity, and her scorn to dread.

A little while Telemos bowed his head with grief, and calmed by heavy sadness, as Velda again looked upon him with fear, he said :

"Hate me for my secrecy if thou wilt, but do not look on me with such fearfulness. This jewel is but a part of my nature, even as the eye or the ear. With me it was born, and with me its power will perish utterly. For countless generations the like has been the birth-right of our royal race—but I am the last of all my people."

She held up her hands before her face and trembled. "Leave me," she said. "I am afraid of thee and thy power. It is horrible and monstrous, and no gift of the gods. I am filled with terror. Perchance thou thyself art one of the spirits of evil—a god of darkness and death."

"No god am I," he said sadly, "but a harmless man, with one more sense than other men. Thou dost not fear the swallow, that, untaught, knows the ways over the barren waste of waters—but to me the swallow seems more wonderful. And every creature that swims or flies or treads the earth has

some special gift from nature, and the wide plains and lofty hills are filled with living wonders. Is it so strange that of all the races of men one at least should have a little more power than others? Why should the betrayal of the heart stop with the trembling lip or the quivering nostril—with the sigh or the laugh—with the cheerful step or the head bowed with grief?"

"Of all this," she said, "I know nothing; but if thou speakest truth—and alas! I feel the truth—thou art no man, but a spirit of evil, or," she added hastily, "of good, perchance; but, for all that, terrible and fearful."

"No god," he repeated, "am I, but a friendless, kinless man, and only stronger than others in this one gift."

"And canst thou know," she said with whispering dread, "all that men would conceal?"

"The eye and the ear," he said, "have

their limits, and so also my jewel. But as far as the boundaries of this city, and a little beyond, my power ranges."

She covered her face and said: "I am afraid. Leave me! I will strive to get back my courage and think of thee as before."

"In less than three days," he said proudly, "thou shalt be free and avenged—and that by this very power thou fearest so much."

"Ah!" she sighed. "If thou givest me life and freedom!" and her voice trembled; and she looked up with tearful eyes as she said, "Leave me!"

And Telemos left her without a word, and he sought the man of means and said fiercely to him: "To-morrow at daybreak, tell thy master, I will give him proof of my power, and name to him the man and the woman most worthy of death in this city. Go and prepare thy display." And the man of means eyed him curiously and departed to seek the king.

IV.

CHAPTER XX.

A TRUE DIVINER.

It was quickly rumoured through the city that on the morrow, at daybreak, the new priest would be brought before the people to show his marvellous powers of divination, and something was hinted of the living jewel. And although no one believed in the gods of his fathers, there was, at the same time, hardly one who did not believe in divination by new omens and strange auguries. And no one doubted that a living jewel might be found ; the only wonder was how far its mysterious power would reach.

As soon as day broke a great multitude was gathered together in a huge temple, which Antinous had appointed for the display of the god-bearer. The king and queen sat enthroned in Eastern state, for little by little Antinous

had added luxury to luxury and extravagance to extravagance, in order to gratify the inordinate passion of the Persian for magnificent splendour.

And first of all heralds proclaimed that the barbarian priestess had again declared that the state was threatened with danger from within. The common people began to question one another and to wonder who the victim would be, eager, as is their wont, to see the downfall of any raised above themselves in wealth or dignity. Yet a few began to murmur, in whispers, that the strength of the colony was being cut off, as they recalled how many had been done to death by the new oracle.

Now it chanced that Antinous had begun to suspect two of the chief captains of his mercenaries, and had quickly determined to avoid the danger by putting them to death. In vain the man of means had warned him that too frequent appeals to the last extreme would disaffect the common soldiery. The advice

had been given with the tone of assurance and air of authority that always drove Antinous further in the opposite course, for, like all tyrants, he believed that wisdom increased with power and pride. And, as was his wont, the man of means was content with warning the king, his master, and professed for himself the utmost indifference to any outcome of chance or fate.

Velda, the priestess, knowing nothing of what she said, nor the meaning of what she did, spent some time in watching the flight of birds and observing other signs, and then announced that certainly the city was in danger from within. Then she began to draw the lots and to determine where the danger lay.

And after she had finished, with a loud voice she cried : " The safety of the people demands two deaths," and thereupon she named the two leaders, and at a sign from Antinous they were quickly seized and bound, and hurried away to death.

And the multitude roared with gratified envy, and those next in command took the vacant posts, with all the alacrity of men whose trade is life and death.

Then the heralds proclaimed that the king had obtained from a far country a soothsayer who was still more wonderful than the Northern priestess. For in the midst of his forehead was set a wonderful jewel, whereby, without signs or aids from bird or beast, he declared the truth, and looked into the hidden secrets of the future.

Then they brought forward Telemos, and placed him full in the light of the rising sun, for the front of the temple was open to the east. And they uncovered his head and removed the golden circlet, and when all had seen the living jewel gleaming from the forehead of the man, they replaced the crown on his brow.

And the people gazed upon him with wonder and dread, for his stately bearing and unmoved countenance, and, above all, the glitter of the

strange jewel, at once enchained their belief.

And many observed that Velda, the priestess, bowed her head and seemed to lose the dignity of her presence even as the moon fades before the sun, and they wondered and believed so much the more.

Antinous looked upon him curiously, but the queen whispered, "I almost repent that we have trusted this man so far. Perchance, he has in truth some strange power, and certainly the jewel is marvellous."

"No creature in the shape of man," said Antinous lightly, "can do what we have feigned this man can do. And it matters little whom he names—man or woman ; there is none in the city whom I honour or love above the rest. If he has already made enemies let him name them, and they shall die the death."

"Hist !" said the queen, "he is about to speak. See, he raises his hand and points to the jewel."

"I must teach him the art of oratory," said the king, "if his voice proves equal to his gestures."

Without a word of himself, or the circumstances of his case, Telemos, with a loud clear voice, that rang with all its force to the furthest corner of the building, began to speak, and though the accents fell somewhat strangely on the ears, not a word of the meaning was lost.

"Unlike this woman," and he pointed to Velda, who stood still with newly found timidity, "who says what she is bidden and knows not herself that it is false, for she knows not one word of your tongue, I speak only what I will, and I speak what I know to be true. Your rulers, in the insolence of pride and folly, have cunningly designed to deceive you by a doubtful account of the power of this living jewel—for living it is, even as the eye or the ear. But they know not, in their foolishness, that they have stumbled unwittingly on

the truth. Look not on me but on them, and see for yourselves whether or no I speak truth and reveal hidden secrets. Look upon them as I speak."

He made a long pause, and the queen said : "This is insolent and audacious—see how the people stare, with rude open eyes."

"I heed them no more than the eyes of a host of flies, and I will take care they do not sting. The pause of the orator was well timed. I will certainly train him in the art—but again he speaks."

Suddenly the new priest again raised his hand and said : "And to prove my power your rulers have commanded me to name the man and the woman in the whole city most worthy of death for secret crimes. And they care not whom I name, for ye are all alike to them and unworthy of their regard. What husbandman would care for two or three blades of corn, and what tyrant will regard two or three lives?"

Again he paused and looked threateningly

on the king, and Antinous with difficulty restrained his anger.

“Yet will I, this time,” continued Telemos, “do their bidding, and declare the man and the woman most worthy of death. And first I name the woman. There she sits,” and he pointed to the queen, and all the people saw that she shuddered with sudden affright.

“There she sits a queen—in place of her who was destroyed at her bidding—Hermione, whom once ye all honoured and loved. Yet was the lust for power of the wandering Persian not satisfied——”

“Wilt thou not check this audacity?” said the queen to the king, but his eyes were fixed on Telemos and he heard her not.

“And therefore she enticed with her snares Glaucus, and shamelessly invited him to share her love and the tyranny.”

“Ha!” exclaimed Antinous, as he looked on the queen, who seemed terrified and dumb with astonishment.

"But Glaucus was too simple and too faithful, and therefore he, too, was done to death by the king's living instrument." Here he pointed to the man of means, who remained utterly unmoved, and tried to fix upon the speaker his restless shifting glances.

"And the heart of this tawny Persian is full of corruption and cruelty, and in one day she would destroy this city and its ruler if she could thereby gain greater. Without doubt she is more worthy of death at your hands than any other woman."

Atossa sat pale and trembling, and she dared not look on the king, who eyed her with jealous doubtfulness, as he muttered :

"Has she dared to play with me?"

But Telemos again took up his denunciation and said quickly :

"And as for the man, there he sits—Antinous, your tyrant ; and on the large earth

there is no man more stained with death-worthy crimes."

Antinous half rose to his feet, but with a great effort checked his wrath and waited.

"For first he defiled the tomb of the founder of your mother-city, and escaped by cunning lies and the innocent death of another——"

The people looked upon their king with horror, for honour to the dead lies deeper than any feeling in the hearts of the most degraded of Greeks.

"And next he consented to the death of his child and her mother——"

A shudder passed through the people as they remembered all the good deeds of Hermione in the troublous past.

Still Antinous forced himself to listen to the end.

"And to preserve his power your tyrant picks out for death every man of mark."

Here Telemos turned to the soldiery and said : "Did one of you ever hold the highest rank a month without suspicion, or three months without death ? No, nor shall one of you. Therefore, I warn you against your betrayers. Look in their faces and see if I have spoken truth."

But Antinous quickly recovered from his dismay, and was filled with wrath, and set himself to uproot the seeds of disaffection. And with a bold mien he rose and said sternly :

"Every word that this man hath spoken is utterly false, and he shall be forced to declare the truth. Doubtless he was in league with the captains who aspired to the tyranny."

And the people began to doubt and wonder, and Antinous said to the man of means :

"Seize him and bind him fast, and take the priestess also. This folly of oracles has gone to dangerous lengths."

But Telemos cried out boldly :

“Thy power, O tyrant, is at an end. The barbarians are at thy gates, and surely they shall destroy the city.”

And even as he spoke a man, in breathless haste, came forcing his way through the crowd towards the king. And as he did so Telemos again cried out :

“This is the messenger of evil tidings, and I see that his lips are trembling to say that the barbarians are threatening a sudden attack.”

And the messenger looked on the god-bearer with terror and said :

“True, true—but how could this man know the truth ?”

“Guard well the prisoners,” said Antinous ;
“I look to the defence.”

And forthwith he placed himself at the head of his guards and hastened to meet the coming danger.

And the people dispersed, wondering and

doubting, and the queen retreated to her apartments, utterly overcome with affright.

But the man of means quickly bound his prisoners and cast them into a strong chamber, and placed at the door one of the most faithful of the guards.

CHAPTER XXI.

LOVE AND FEAR.

THE attack which the barbarians had designed, in spite of its suddenness, was defeated by the strength of the defences of the place by nature and art. It came, however, so near to success that Antinous made diligent inquiries whence his natural enemies had received such an accession of strength, for he perceived that the boldest in the fight were barbarians strange alike in their bodily appearance, their arms, and their war-cries. But he learned nothing certain until the man of means, after he had put the prisoners under guard, came to his aid. And he at once declared that the men were of the tribe of the captive Velda, and had doubtless followed after her for rescue or revenge. This opinion was speedily confirmed by a

message demanding her release, and threatening the destruction of the city. But Antinous was enraged and sent back the messenger maimed and beaten, having tortured him in vain to learn the strength and plan of the enemy.

And as soon as the safety of the city was secured the thoughts of the king turned on the words of the god-bearer, and his heart was troubled. He feared to lose his authority over the soldiery and the people, if they believed what the diviner had spoken. But most of all he was maddened with anger and jealous questionings and doubts regarding his queen.

If the man Telemos, by cunning or some unknown treachery, had discovered his own secrets, why should he not also find out the hidden plots of Atossa? Her cowering dread came back upon him with resistless force, and he quickly decided to slay her with his own hand. And having lost faith in the

queen he lost faith altogether, and knew not what to believe or to disbelieve. He turned suddenly on Toxar, as if he would for once take him by surprise, and said :

“False slave, it is from thee this false diviner learned his lies—if they are lies. Confess thy share in the plot or I will break thee in pieces.”

“If it please the king,” said Toxar, “I knew nothing of what the man would say.”

“How then did he learn, for he certainly spoke the truth, at least in part, as thou well knowest? Surely such is not the common report regarding Hermione?”

“No.”

“How then did he hit upon the truth? Answer—quickly.”

“Perchance the man is a true diviner.”

“Thou wouldst say that I—I—I have been befooled by a woman. Surely I will tear the truth from her heart. Begone—thy

callous, grovelling slavishness makes me mad.

Stay—I yet believe thou art faithful.”

“I live only to obey my master.”

“Surely—I have proved thee as never man yet was proved. Listen ! I fear that the words of this soothsayer may weaken my authority. Go through the city—above all mix with the soldiery. Be eyes and ears to me—and if there is any treachery make report before nightfall.”

“I hear and obey,” was the monotonous reply. And the slave departed, and Antinous sought the Persian in her apartments, his heart filled with the rage and cruelty of jealous doubt.

In the meantime Atossa had fought with her fears, even as on the day when she first danced before Antinous ; and she had conquered even as before, and hidden her terror with the perfect semblance of love. Wearily, but steadfastly, she waited the return of Antinous with lips and eyes and every

movement ready to break into the tenderness of passion, and as soon as he entered she sprang to meet him with every look and gesture playing to her purpose.

"The city is safe, I well know. My king is unconquerable, but too great bravery is dangerous. Welcome, dearest heart!"

"The city," he replied coldly, "is certainly safe but for treachery."

"None would dare betray thee," she said with confidence.

Antinous looked upon her curiously, but she met his gaze without any sign of alarm.

"What dost thou think of this sooth-sayer?" he asked abruptly.

"Even as thou," she said. "He is an audacious weaver of falsehoods. That fable of the violated tomb——"

"That at least was no fable. It was I who did the deed that was noised through Greece; and with my oratory I beguiled the

people and slew mine enemy. Therein at least the diviner divined most truly."

The Persian laughed aloud to hide her terror and said: "I did not think even thy courage could go so far; to slay thine enemy with oratory was wonderful. I love thee all the more."

"Thou wilt not again seek to betray me?" he questioned, fascinated by her beauty.

"I—" she said, "betray—thee. Impossible."

"Then thou didst not seek, as the soothsayer declared, to beguile Glaucus?"

"And dost thou dare to tell me," she laughed back to him, "that I would have betrayed thee for such as him?"

"Yet he was a brave man and loved thee."

"Brave he might be. I know nought of bravery. And he loved me foolishly, as many have done, and he hated thee and, as

I said, would have slain thee for love of me.
He was the traitor, not I."

"Then regarding thee the soothsayer spoke
falsely?"

The Persian laughed aloud with marvellous
art—the laugh of a taunting maiden to her
lover.

"Has thy wisdom," she said, "altogether
left thee, and wilt thou with thine eyes open
fall into the most common and simple of
snares? This soothsayer, like the rest of his
tribe, may sometimes chance upon a grain
of truth by sifting many rumours. Doubt-
less thou hast many enemies and they have
given him matter enough for his art."

"But why—how did he dare at the peril
of his life?"

"I know not," she said, "perchance the
man is mad or he would dethrone thee or—
But who can tell what a hopeless prisoner
would not dare?"

Antinous could not withstand her fearless

tone and innocent bearing and yet he doubted and said :

“ Why wast thou so utterly cast down ? ”

“ Because,” she said, “ I am by nature the most cowardly and fearful of women. And I feared the people and even thee.”

“ And thou didst not seek to beguile Glauçus ? ”

“ Never.”

Again she had won and again she hastened to use her victory and said :

“ It is long since I asked of thee a gift, but now I ask thee thou must not refuse.” She kissed him on the lips and he felt her heart beating on his breast.

“ If thou art true to me all that I have is thine.”

“ If—” she said, “ still if.”

“ Ask,” he said. “ I will grant it.”

“ This diviner,” she said, “ this forger of lies with the jewel fastened cunningly to his brow——”

"Thinkest thou——"

"Surely," she said, "a man is not an oyster to grow a pearl, and why would he never let thee or any one look closely?"

"It is possible that I believed too quickly."

"Give this trickster to me for a gift! And first I will get his secret, by guile or force, and then he shall die the worst of deaths." She spoke with the extremity of rage and cruelty and continued: "Not a second time shall he try to mar our love. Give him to me for a gift."

"If thou canst," said Antinous, "lay bare his cunning I will give him thee for life or death. Do with him as thou wilt, with force or guile; yet slay him not forthwith, for I too, from his own lips, would know the secret of his divinings. Come, we will go together."

"Nay," she pleaded; "thou wilt spoil my design. Wait thou till I have done. I will not slay him."

"He is thine," he said, "till the morrow." And he gave her the signet which the guards were bound to honour, and having embraced her passionately, he left her.

Atossa smiled upon him even as he left the apartment, and then, utterly exhausted with the conflict, she fell down helplessly on a couch. She had played her part till the danger had sapped her strength.

In her heart she knew well, not only that Telemos had spoken the truth, but that of his own power alone he had divined her secret. She had lied to Antinous, but to herself she could not lie. She wondered at her momentary success, and she feared that as soon as Antinous questioned this terrible revealer, he would add proof to proof, and then there was nothing but death.

Sick with terror she lay still, and one after another turned aside the plans that rose in her mind. She could not flee from

Antinous, and with such a being as Telemos guile was as futile as force.

Never for one moment did Atossa question the power of the glorious jewel, or doubt the truth of the god-bearer, for no philosophy had ever cramped for her the boundless wonders of nature. She saw and heard, and believed without questioning.

The night began to fall, and before the morrow she must be prepared, and in spite of the danger, there seemed to be no better course than to put the man to death. Antinous, indeed, might then suspect; but if the man lived, he would certainly know that she had thought to betray him.

Therefore, slowly and heavily, she tried to force her will to disobey Antinous, and slay the man before the dawn. But she tried in vain, for she feared that his wrathful jealousy would again awaken his distrust.

Long she lay, senseless with fear, the jewel blazing before her eyes, and the fierce words

of contemptuous denunciation ringing in her ears.

Suddenly her face flushed with radiant joy. She leaped up from her couch and laughed softly to herself. "Fool that I was, not to think of it before. But it is not too late; the night has hardly begun. With thee, sweet ring"—and she kissed the signet of Antinous—"with thee, I will conquer this evil prophet. For with thee I have power, and he with his jewel has knowledge only. The horror that I dreaded shall be changed into hope."

Proudly, and with a firm step, she went alone to the chamber where the captives were imprisoned.

CHAPTER XXII.

A SLAVE'S OBEDIENCE.

A LITTLE while after Atossa had gone to fulfil her design, the man of means, by the command of Antinous, came to him to report concerning the safety of the city and the discipline of the mercenaries.

“What of the soldiery? Hast thou used all thy skill to search their hearts?”

“For the present all is well.”

“How sayst thou—for the present?”
Dost thou fear for the future? Are there any signs of disaffection?”

“The worst of men,” said the slave, “fear and venerate dead bones, and the vilest honour the natural affections in others, and most of all in their superiors.”

“All this I know; but do the people

and the mass of the mercenaries believe this soothsayer ?”

“Ignorance is ever full of superstition.”

“How is this ? Thou art not wont to be so careful in thy speech. Tell me plainly—is there disaffection—is there danger ?”

“The king, since he assumed the tyranny in the Persian style, has not always permitted his slave to speak plainly.”

“Speak as roughly as thou wilt ; I not only permit—I command thee.”

“The air is full of mutterings and curses, and the belief is spreading that for thy sins the whole city will be destroyed.”

“Are my gifts so soon forgotten, and the power of my hand made light of ? Dost thou say that hired soldiers will weigh the secret sins of their master against his treasure ?”

“Perchance,” said the slave, “they hope to divide the treasure. Certain it is that the mass of the soldiery might easily be led to revolt.”

"What ? Are none faithful ? Not even the guard that it was thy boast to select and train in discipline ?"

"The guard, indeed, is of my choosing and ordering ; and of the guard, every man will die with thee or for thee—sin or no sin. Thy signet is their god."

Antinous laughed aloud and said : "There spoke my man of means. With thee and thy scholars I fear nothing. I trust no man, not even myself, as I trust thee. Say, shall we at once—with the aid of the faithful—sally out and crush the superstitious, disobedient rabble ?"

The slave remained for a time lost in thought, and then said : "Does the king indeed trust no man as he trusts me ?"

"I have said it—and with truth."

"And the king will in this follow my counsel ?"

"Assuredly."

"Then I counsel delay ; to see what the

night may bring forth. Many a change may occur between the sleeping and the waking thought."

"Delay, then, is best?"

"Delay is best—for my master." The man's eyes seemed to betoken some strange, unuttered thought, and Antinous said: "What dost thou mean—for thy master? Is it not best for thee also?"

"For me? I am the perfect slave of my master."

"And if," questioned Antinous, "any evil chance befall, everything is ready for escape? The galley is laden and well appointed, and the guards and seamen are faithful?"

"Surely."

"See that there is no error regarding my escape—if need be."

"There shall certainly be no error regarding thy escape."

As the slave was about to depart, Antinous

said to him : "Stay, in delay there is no haste, and I would talk with thee more at length. What thinkest thou of this soothsayer ?"

"That he is the most wonderful creature living."

"Ha ! This is a new thing. Hast thou, then, changed thy first thought ?"

"Opinion ever follows facts. I have heard the man tell of strange things."

"Strange indeed," said Antinous. "With thee I may be frank. Thou knowest already that much of what he declared was true ; but the violation of the tomb, that even thou wast not aware of."

"No."

"Yet therein also he spoke aright, and it is wonderful how, by a happy guess, he chanced to hear the voice of truth in the noises of rumour. Whence does he derive his cunning ?"

"Even as he said," replied Toxar, "from the power of his new sense."

“What ! Dost thou, too, believe in the virtue of this living jewel ?”

“It seems strange, indeed, but is only strange in that we are not familiar with it. In itself, it is no more wonderful than the eye or the ear.”

“Surely once, at least, thou art simple and foolish,” said Antinous scornfully. “And that is easily proved ; for though regarding me he spoke the truth—by accident and, as I say, by a happy sifting of rumours—regarding my queen, he spoke with the utmost falsity.”

Antinous looked on his slave’s face, and as he looked, jealous doubt again seized him ; and he tried to crush it with pride, and said again fiercely—“with the utmost falsity. How dost thou explain this falsehood and its audacity ?”

“Therein also,” said the slave, unmoved as ever, and with measured deliberation—“therein also, the living jewel declared the truth.”

Antinous sprang up with fury, as if he would slay the man where he stood. But doubt again made him waver, and he paused and said : "Prove thy words or die. How dost thou know ? Thou, at least, hast no charm, living or dead."

"I saw with mine eyes and heard with mine ears."

"And what didst thou see and hear ?"

"Even as this god-bearer declared. The Persian enticed Glaucus to slay thee, and to take thy place, both in the tyranny and in her love."

"And why, thou faithless, miserable wretch, didst thou not tell me ? Why didst thou let me do to death my friend, and by thy hands, and why didst thou let me live befooled by this tawny wanderer ? Surely thou hast deserved the worst of deaths."

"The king, my master, forbade me to speak one word in favour of Glaucus, or even to advise an hour's delay, and there-

fore he fell over the steep rock and perished."

Antinous recalled the very words of the slave, and checked his anger and said: "True, but why wilt thou always mar thy best counsel with looks and voice that urge me to the opposite course?"

"Surely," said Toxar meekly, "the look of a broken-spirited slave cannot turn the purpose of the mighty ruler whom he only lives to obey."

"But this was obedience carried to madness."

"Madness perchance it is that makes me such as I am, a living instrument for another. But thou wouldst not upbraid the sword that it did not speak, nor the shield that it gave no counsel, nor wouldst thou murmur because the iron looked not kindly on thy purpose. And as for me, I am even as the iron of sword or shield."

Antinous was raging with an angry

tumult of feeling, and the words of the slave fell upon his ear even as an empty noise. Suddenly he turned on Toxar and said fiercely: "And why dost thou tell me now?"

"Methought it was the king's command, and I ever hear and obey."

"Never again let me hear thy slavish catch-words. Thy obedience has been my bane. Art thou, in truth, faithful?"

"Faithful to death—to my master."

Antinous looked upon him: "Often I have proved thee, and thou must be true; perchance mad in some strange manner, but true——"

He stopped speaking and listened with sudden alarm.

"What is that uproar?" he asked.

"The war cries of the barbarians and the shrieks of the wounded," said the man of means.

Again Antinous strained his ears and cried:

"But the sounds of battle are coming nearer. What doth this portend?"

"Assuredly," said Toxar, "the enemy is within the city, and treachery has already done its work."

Again Antinous listened, and after a short delay he addressed Toxar with furious impatience.

"In any event—and this uproar grows apace—there is much to do and to undo. But first of all summon hither this poisonous Persian; with her I will deal in a moment."

The man of means turned to go, but Antinous cried: "Stay, that is but a small part of thy duty. The guard and the seamen are faithful?"

"They are certainly faithful."

"Take from the Persian my signet, and hasten, for she begged it of me for an evil purpose. Put the guard—every man—under arms, and I myself will lead them. Open

the brazen door and bid the seamen man the galley. Use the utmost speed—canst thou not hear the fighting? And first the queen—and look to it that thou frighten her not. Let the command be a request.”

Toxar again turned to go, but again his master checked him and said :

“And bring to me my god-bearer. If he spake truth, he is worth more than an army or a city. Hasten, look to his safety—but first the queen.”

Again Toxar turned to go, but he had not reached the door when Antinous cried to him :

“Is the priestess in truth the daughter of this barbarian that threatens to take my city, if indeed it is not lost already?”

“She is in truth his daughter, and his purpose is to rescue her or destroy her captors.”

“Ah !” said Antinous, “then slay her with thine own hand. Thou dost not fear

to shed the blood of one of thy race? Yet, perchance, pity may move thee."

The slave held out his twisted fingers and maimed hands, and said: "The crooked claws of the eagle shall be more pitiful to the young lamb than these hands to the enemies of my master"—he paused a little and muttered, "for the time being."

Then he departed before Antinous could again chide him for his ill-omened words. And in truth already the mind of Antinous was busy with matters of much more moment than the manner of a mad slave.

Never was a man quicker in thought or swifter in action than Antinous, and before the slave had reached the queen's apartment his master had balanced his judgment and fixed his intents.

First he would slay the woman who had befooled him. The Persian should never again deceive him or any other. Pride and jealousy drove out all remembrance of love.

Then his thoughts turned on the wonder of the living jewel, and he no more disbelieved in its power. On the contrary he now began to magnify its virtue, and to imagine how the owner might become the greatest of men living or dead. And was not the man his captive ?

In spite of the tumult of the fighting, Antinous was lost in thought as he pictured to himself the marvellous uses to which the jewel might be turned.

And he reflected with scorn on Telemos, who with such a gift had done nothing in his own behoof, and had not even foreseen his imprisonment.

And Antinous gloried as he thought, even if his city were lost, that he would wander through the earth, like a hero who had ensnared a god and wished for and obtained a priceless boon.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE VENGEANCE OF ATOSSA.

IN the meantime whilst Antinous was still planning wondrous deeds to be wrought by the aid of his god-bearer Atossa had carried out her design.

Telemos and Velda had been bound hand and foot and placed by the man of means in a strongly-built chamber, which the king used as a secret prison. The door was made fast by heavy bolts, and for greater safety one of the faithful guards was stationed without.

"Is this," said Velda to her fellow-prisoner, "the outcome of thy plan? Methinks now we cannot even escape by death itself," and she strained with impotent fury at her fetters.

"I am vexed most bitterly that they

should have maltreated thee thus. For myself it was but a natural part of my scheme, and by design for thy safety I told thee nothing. But have patience and courage and in a few short hours all will be well."

"Alas," she said, "thy power is of no avail against stone and iron. And what was this cunning device? For my part open war——" here she checked her speech.

"Thy kinsmen," he said, "could not with bare hands break through the walls and gates of this tyrant's defences; but by my aid," he continued proudly, "they are already within the city."

"By thy aid?" she asked in wonder, "and thou a prisoner."

"Didst thou not see," he said, "the looks of the king and queen, of the people and of the soldiery, when I declared my prophecies?"

"Alas," she said, "I understand not one word."

"But didst thou not see—surely so much the common eye can see—that fear and doubt and horror suddenly seized the assembly, and most of all the king and queen?"

"So much I indeed saw, but there was an end."

"Nay," he said with firmness, "there was but the beginning. For by those few words I scattered discord and treachery throughout the city, and by this time the whole colony is ablaze with rebellion."

"But of what avail can that be to us?"

"Already," he said, "the greater part of the mercenaries have revolted, and they have opened the gates."

"Ah," she sighed, "forgive me. That was in truth a brave design, at the risk of thy life. Art thou sure?" she whispered as if afraid. "Canst thou indeed look through these cruel walls?"

"As easily," he said, "as thou canst hear the tramp of this soldier past the door."

"Canst thou not," she asked, "if thy power is so great, bid him loosen our fetters? They strangle my life."

"This man and his fellows," he said, "still remain faithful to the tyrant—alone of all his hired bands."

"Thou hast, then, no power over him?" and she chafed at her bonds with ill-suppressed fury.

"Alas, no," he answered. "But in a little while thou shalt be free and avenged. Look on me and take courage. See, I know perfectly, and I have no dread."

She turned her eyes to him, and on the instant, just as he had finished speaking, a look of terror crossed the face of Telemos.

"What is this?" she asked.

For answer he gave a great cry of pain, and shouted to the guard in his own tongue. "I must speak with thee. Enter quickly. Dost

thou not hear ? Haste, I say, or it will be too late."

The man entered with a look of surprise on his face.

With rapid vehemence Telemos addressed him : " If thou wouldst save thy life do my bidding. Above all, refuse admittance to this cruel Persian, the queen. Let her not enter, for thy life."

The soldier looked upon him with amazement and said : " Art thou mad, O sooth-sayer ? Truly, before I thought thee mad. The queen comes not."

" I tell thee she comes with evil in her heart, and she brings the signet of Antinous ; but obey her not."

" And I tell thee," was the reply, " that the queen comes not ; but if she comes with authority why should I do thy bidding and not my master's ?"

" To save thy life," said Telemos hurriedly. " The troops—all save thy company—have

revolted. The barbarians are already within the gates. Stay with us, and listen not to this Persian, and thou shalt be safe."

"Hast thou made an end?" replied the man stolidly. "I believe not in thy power, and if thou couldst search my heart thou wouldst know that thy words are vain. I obey Antinous to the death, treachery or no treachery."

"Alas," said Telemos, "thou hast spoken truly." Even as he spoke light footsteps were heard approaching, and the guard rushed to the door.

"Thou must do as I bid thee," said the voice of Atossa, "and this shall be thy warrant." She showed him the signet ring, and gave the secret word.

The soldier saluted her with respect, and the queen entered the chamber when she had learned that the prisoners were safely bound.

As she entered, Telemos said hastily to

Velda, "This evil woman comes to do me deadly harm, but thee she will not touch."

"What is thy fear?" she said. "Would that my right arm were free, and I——" Again she struggled with her fetters.

"In vain, in vain," he said. "But tell me that thou wilt be glad to be free by my aid."

The tears stood in her eyes as she whispered, "I would give my life for thine. Will this woman dare to slay——"

But before she could make an end to her questioning, Atossa suddenly addressed Telemos, who lay helplessly on the ground, his eyes filled with fear and loathing.

"Dost thou foresee thine own doom, thou evil prophet?"

A look of despair crossed the captive's face, and then he set himself, with steadfast courage, to battle with his fate.

"Thy plan," he said, "is as foolish as it is cruel."

Atossa seemed to heed him not, but said to the guardian, "Bind him closer yet. Look to it well that he cannot move." The man did as he was bidden, and then she said to him : "Now resume thy watch, and let none approach."

"Stay," said Telemos in despair, "for thy life."

"Go," interrupted Atossa, "and close the door. I would talk with this soothsayer alone."

When the soldier had gone and made fast the door Atossa addressed Telemos, and said again : "Dost thou foresee thy doom, thou evil prophet? For the last time use thy power."

As she spoke she took from beneath her robe a sharp glittering knife.

Telemos made a last effort to move her from her purpose. "Thou canst no more use the jewel as I do than thou canst pluck out the eye of the eagle and see with it."

"Use thy power for the last time, and know that I believe thee not. I will rob thee of thy charm, and with it I will become the queen of the earth."

"It is no charm ; it is part of my life, even as the eye or ear."

"I believe thee not. Many are the virtues of precious stones."

She came close to him, and he said rapidly :
"Touch me not, and I will tell thee a matter of the highest moment. At this instant thy life is in danger."

"Speak," she said, and a look of fear clouded her eyes.

"I will not speak unless thou wilt do me no wrong."

"I believe thee not," said Atossa. "The power is in the jewel and not in thee, and henceforth the power shall be mine."

She stooped over him with the sharp knife, and Telemos knew that her will was as hard and cruel as the iron in her hand. Then he

looked in her face with desperate courage and cried :

“ Destroy my power—destroy my life ; but know for certain thou shalt die this very night.”

The queen again showed signs of fear, but she wavered not in her resolution.

With a trembling hand she took away the golden circlet, and then with a swift sharp stroke she severed the jewel from its hold.

So slight had been the bond of union with the slightly thickened skin that only one drop of blood marked the spot, and the scar was hardly to be seen. Yet the victim gave a deep groan and became senseless.

When the queen observed that the severance had left no wound, her heart leaped with gladness, and she said scornfully :

“ Couldst thou lose part of thy living body without a wound ? Surely I knew the virtue lay in the stone.”

But when Telemos still lay as one dead,

she began to fear that in some way the loss of the jewel had slain him, and she dreaded the wrath of Antinous. And as she pondered, loud above the wild barbaric words that all the time Velda helplessly cast about her, she heard the cries and shrieks that had alarmed Antinous, and announced the loss of the city.

Hastily she summoned the guard and said :

“What is this tumult ?”

“Methinks,” said the man, “to me the soothsayer spoke truth, and that the city is in the hands of the barbarians.”

Atossa trembled with new alarm, and said to the guard :

“I go to the king. Look thou to thy prisoners. Or if thou, too, wouldst go, loosen this raging woman, and let her tend on the soothsayer ; for he must not die.”

She left the man wondering, and, as he was bidden, he released Velda and took away the bonds from Telemos. Then he

brought wine and food, and as the uproar without increased he fastened the door and left the captives alone.

And as soon as Telemos had lost the power which Velda had so much dreaded, the heart of the untamed barbarian was filled with love and pity. With gentle words and timid caresses she tried to recall his senses, and heedless of the war-cries which announced the victory of her kinsmen, she gave herself to the care of her liberator.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A DEAD CHARM.

ATOSSA passed quickly to her own apartment, and dismissed her attendants. She placed herself before a mirror of shining brass, and hastened to make trial of the virtue of the stolen jewel. She believed in all simplicity that as soon as she had put on her brow the golden circlet, and fastened in the midst of it the wondrous stone, she would be able to search out all the secrets of every heart. No doubt troubled her mind, and no fear perplexed her resolution, as she swiftly determined to essay her new power first of all on Antinous. She paused for a moment and held up the jewel close to the light of a hanging lamp. And as she looked on its marvellous beauty, and marked the colours changing and gleaming

like an indescribable union of the glories of the most precious gems, she was dazzled by the sight, and, lost in admiration, almost forgot her task.

But the uproar in the city came nearer and nearer, and loudly summoned her to instant action.

Straightway she cunningly fastened the jewel in the midst of the golden circlet with the finest golden threads, and then she placed upon her head the crown of mystic power. And in spite of the growing tumult she stood for a time looking at her image in the shining mirror, and she thought in her heart that never had any adornment so much enhanced her beauty.

But again the uproar from without broke in rudely upon her musing, and bade her at once essay her power.

And she rapidly turned her mind upon Antinous, and sought to read the secret of his heart.

She waited, full of wonder and confidence, for the power of the jewel to unfold. She looked with her charm towards his chamber, but she found him not, and with it she sought him throughout the city, but she could not pierce the narrow walls of her apartment.

She turned again to the shining mirror, and tried to drive away her rising fear with the gleaming wonders of the jewel. She pressed it closer to her brow, and strained the golden threads to breaking, and still she saw nothing save what she saw with her eyes. A sudden dread seized her that the soothsayer had spoken truth; and his warning of her coming death made her tremble with affright.

The sounds of battle came nearer and nearer, and she knew not what to do. The golden circlet weighed upon her like a heavy stone, and the jewel seemed to burn her brow.

She laid them aside. Suddenly a ray of hope shot through the blackness—perchance, to show its power the jewel must be closer to the living flesh. With a firm hand she tore away a shred of the outer skin on her brow and pressed the jewel to the smarting wound. But still she saw nothing save what she saw with her eyes, and she knew of a surety that Telemos had spoken the truth.

And if confirmation were needed, confirmation was at hand, for the man of means came to summon her to Antinous, and in vain she tried to read the inner meaning of his deferential request, as she gave up to him the signet.

She had little time to devise new counsel, but thrice before, in her peril, she had conquered Antinous with her native guile, and she hoped once again for victory.

She salved the torn skin with an Eastern medicament, and again placed on her head

the golden circlet, and pressed to her brow the shining jewel.

“He, at least,” she said fiercely, “shall believe in my power, until I have escaped from this danger. And if need be he shall die by my hand, and I will flee away alone with the treasure in the ship.”

And again she set herself to play her part bravely, and like a queen crowned for a triumph, she went to seek her lord.

CHAPTER XXV.

TARDY FATE.

As she entered his chamber, Antinous gazed upon her with astonishment, and though the fact stared him in the face he knew it not. He saw on her head a band of gold and a wondrous jewel, marvellously like to that of his god-bearer—only marvellously like—that was the thought of the moment.

Then, as he looked again, the truth struck him, as with a sudden blow.

“Thou hast not dared——” he began ; and his voice was choked with boundless vexation and anger.

Atossa looked upon him boldly, in spite of the cold fear at her heart, and her lips seemed to smile and her eyes to shine with the love of a petulant maiden.

“Thou didst put the man in my power

—that thou canst not deny—to do as I would with him, if I but spared his life.”

“Then thou hast done it,” he said fiercely, “though the man’s life without his power is of no worth.”

Atossa made a last effort, and laughed aloud.

“Be not so angry. The man was thine enemy and mine, and he confessed to me that the jewel was a charm, and gave its power to any wearer. Therefore I took it from him, and I will give it thee for a gift.”

But Antinous said :

“Thou canst no more use the virtue of the jewel than thou canst see with an eye stolen from the eagle. Try thy power, and say what mean these shrieks and this tumult.”

She trembled to hear from Antinous the very words of Telemos, and the omen seemed evil.

But as she listened to the fighting, which now seemed close to the palace, she remem-

bered the words of the guard, and said boldly :

“Alas ! the barbarians are within the gates, and the city is in danger.”

“The city,” said Antinous, “is in danger—that is plain to the common ear. But now discover the secret thought of my heart, and then I will believe thy story.”

She looked bravely into his eyes, as if she would compel him to burn as of old with love for her. And in a gentle soothing voice she said to him : “Thou art thinking, dearest love, that we shall sail away together to a distant land, and build a great city, and forget the ills of the old life in the pleasures of the new. We have long years before us and much treasure, and above all the wonderful power of this jewel. Therefore, thy heart is full of love and hope. Say, have I not spoken truly ?”

And as she spoke she came close to him and held out her arms to embrace him.

And even then, Antinous was almost conquered, and he refused not her embrace. But on the instant that her lips touched his, a blaze of jealous anger fired his slumbering purpose, and even as she kissed him he drew his dagger and beneath the shoulder struck her to the heart.

“Thou liest !” he cried out.

“Ah ! Life, Life !” she murmured, and fell dead at his feet.

And as she fell the jewel dropped from the circlet, and in his anger Antinous crushed it with his heel, and it was shivered to little pieces.

And a vision passed before him of the violated tomb and the broken jewel, and he laughed with proud scorn, and said to himself : “If I believed in omens this surely were a happy accident. For before, it boded the death of mine enemy. And doubtless my man of means will quickly come and tell me that he has avenged me on these barbarians

by the death of the woman. And then I will flee away, if the city is certainly lost."

And as he muttered to himself, and, looking on the beauty of Atossa, already regretted that he had lost her love for ever, the man of means entered.

He looked gaunt and grim, and his eyes seemed to have lost their unsteady fluttering, and to shine with a stern savage light.

In his hand he bore a barbaric battle-axe smeared with blood.

"Ha!" said Antinous, "thou hast already revenged me on one woman as I myself on another," and he pointed to the Persian.

The man of means looked on the dead queen and muttered to himself: "Often has she, too, called me slave, and now she, too, is dead."

And Antinous said: "Hast thou obeyed all my commands?"

"I have obeyed the commands of my master—but one task yet remains," and he

brandished his weapon with rapid sweeps of the arm.

“And what,” asked Antinous, “hast thou left undone? It was useless to bring the maimed trunk of the god-bearer, for this woman had stolen his power.”

“One task yet remains,” said the slave fiercely.

“Come,” said Antinous, “it is high time to fight or to flee; is this danger too much for thy broken spirit?”

As he spoke he moved towards the door, but the huge barbarian stood in his way and shook his axe in his face.

“Art thou mad, my man of means?”

The man eyed him for the first time with open scorn and hatred, and cried with a loud voice :

“Thy city, little tyrant, is lost, and thy wealth is another’s, and thy slave is another’s. By the law of conquest, O most wise philosopher, I have become man of means to thy

conqueror, and now I will do his bidding—not thine, puny Greekling. But before I slay thee, know that Velda, my king's daughter, is safe, and thy guards are scattered and destroyed, and thy galley, with its treasure, is also taken. And now, die in thy shame.”

“Traitorous dog!” cried Antinous, and though his only weapon was the dagger, with which he had slain the Persian, he set himself bravely to wait the attack of the slave.

But with the first rush the man of means dashed aside his arm, and with his axe crashed through head and neck.

And Antinous fell dead on the body of Atossa, and Toxar gloried over them with savage exultation.

“Thus thou, too, hast perished, the last of my masters. And now methinks my spirit is healed and I will go back to the forests of my youth a free man, with shield and spear, and no more a man of means to another. And well did I learn the crafty learning of

these crafty Greeks, and well did I become their perfect slave. Yet did I play with their lives as a maiden plays with a ball. And all my masters have perished by my means, and I have made sport of them and befooled them to the end, and the very fulfilment of their desires has been their destruction. But most of all I hated thee, thou shifty Greek, and many a time I almost gave up my sport to slay thee before the fulness of time. Dead thou art, and a grim welcome wilt thou deserve from the dead. And as for me, I have avenged my years of slavery."

' And therewith he broke into a wild chant of daring and victory, and answered back, with loud shouts, the tumultuous battle-cries of the barbarians.

And his tribesmen found him raging with madness ; and not till long after they had reached their own land did his frenzy leave him. And he remembered nothing of the past save his skill in various crafts, and he knew

not that he had been a slave of the Greeks. But as is the custom with the barbarians, he was treated with great honour and reverence, on account of his madness and his wonderful knowledge.

EPILOGUE.

“AND here,” said Xenophilos, “I had ended my narrative, for I had once more shown to my liking the weakness of man and the infinite mysteries of nature. But the youngest of the young men, my favourite, said to me : ‘O master, may I ask thee one little question, of no great import, for in my youthful foolishness I have listened more to the story than to the lesson.’ ‘Speak,’ I said, ‘the lesson is nought but the old weary burden of the poets, and that thou wilt learn of life itself. Speak, what is thy question ?’”

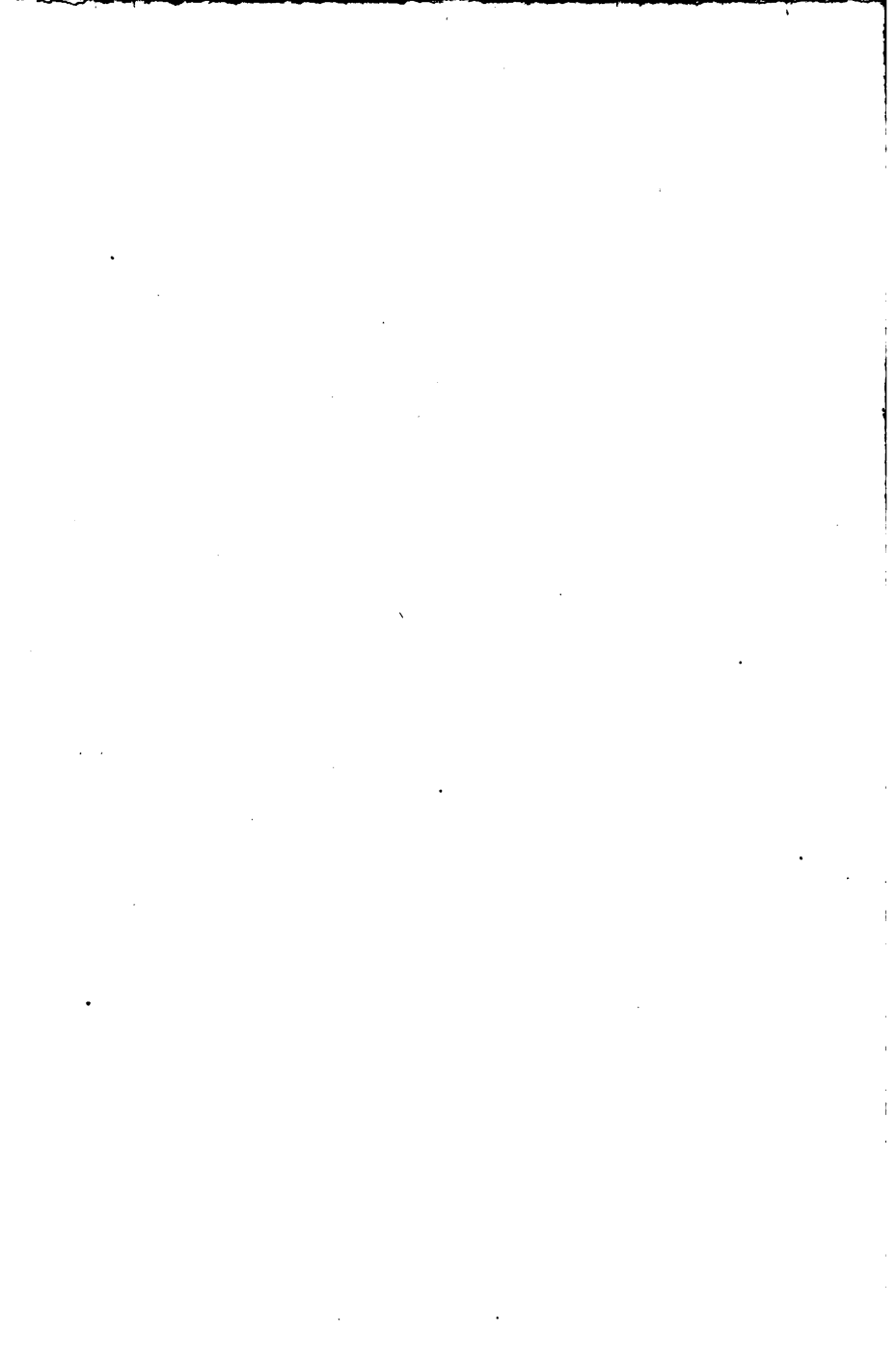
“Tell me,” he said, “had the children of Velda and Telemos the strange power of the father ?”

“The first-born, a boy,” I replied, “had a tiny scar on his brow, but no jewel ; and the

others had not even a trace of the mark.
And Velda was highly pleased thereat—
Telemos not."

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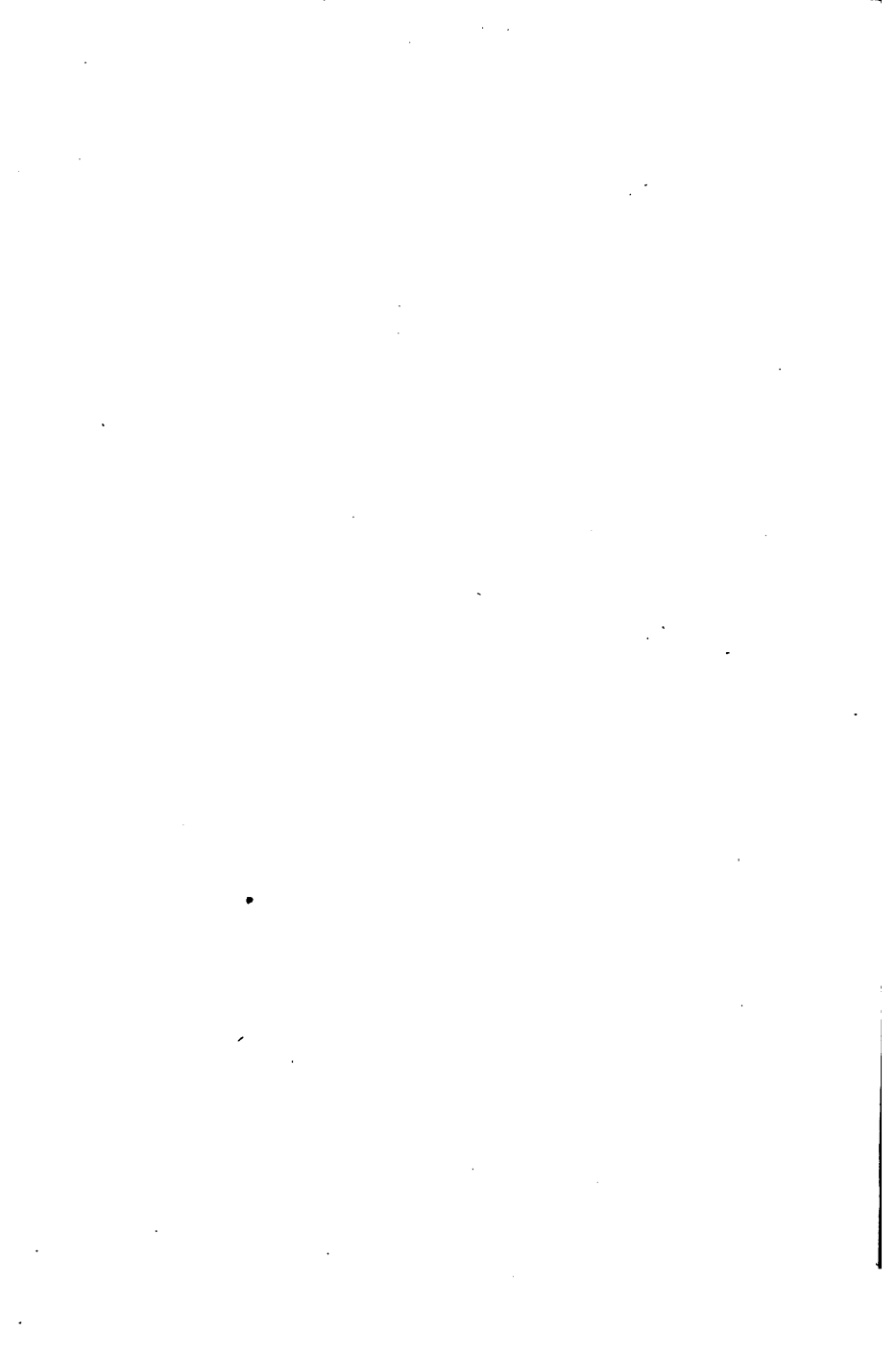
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